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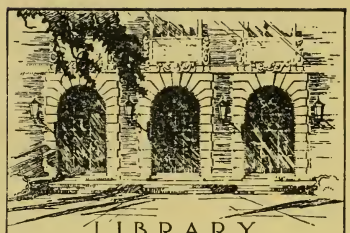

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MARRIED OR SINGLE?

BY

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"DIANA BARRINGTON," "A FAMILY LIKENESS," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

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MARRIED OR SINGLE?

CHAPTER I.

THE PUPIL-TEACHER.

MRS. AND THE MISSES HARPER.

SELECT ESTABLISHMENT

FOR

YOUNG LADIES.

The above, engraved in bold characters on a highly-polished brass plate, may be read on the gate of an imposing mansion situated in the far-spreading suburbs of Riverside, one of the principal mercantile

towns in England. "Harperton" is a solid and secluded residence, standing in its own grounds (of two acres, one perch). It is planned to resemble a country house of some pretensions, but the symmetry of its proportions is spoiled by a long, low building jutting out at the side, that may be taken for anything from a stable to a billiard-room, but is, in fact, the scene of Mrs. Harper's scholastic labours, erected at her own cost—in other words, the schoolroom. This apartment is illuminated by six windows, the lower halves of which are, of course, of muffled glass. The floor is carpeted here and there, as it were, in squares or plots, and in the midst of each square there is a desk and a comfortable cushioned chair. These indicate the localities of the various classes. The schoolroom walls are covered with maps, book-cases, lists of

rules, and practising hours, and lined with narrow desks and benches. A worn piano, a prim, white-faced clock, and a high wire fender comprise most of the furniture—ornamental and otherwise; unless we include the two young ladies who are sitting at one of the far desks, making the most of their time whilst the boarders are out for their usual walk. One of these damsels has mendaciously pleaded ear-ache in order to escape the hateful daily promenade. The other—that nondescript character, a pupil-teacher—is fulfilling a part of her duties, and diligently darning the "little ones'" stockings, whilst her companion, with both elbows on the desk, and both hands in her ruffled hair, watches her and talks.

"This must be perfectly awful for you, Maddie dear," she was saying. "Don't you loathe it all, and wish you could run

away? I should, if I were in your shoes."

"Run away! What nonsense, Flo! Where could I run to, even supposing such an insane idea had entered my head, which it never has done? You forget that I have no friends in England; and, after all, I am not such an object of pity as you seem to imagine," darning steadily all the time.

"If you are not, I should like to know who is!" demanded her schoolfellow, emphatically. "You are one day at the top of the tree, the head of the first class, the best pupil Herr Kroot ever had, adored by the Harpies"—here Miss Blewitt alluded to her respected instructress and daughters—"always exquisitely dressed, with heaps of pocket-money, sleeping in the best room, allowed a fire in winter, every extra—claret and coffee

—and I don't know *what!* After years and years of this style of thing, and when you are seventeen, and almost finished, your father suddenly stops supplies, you are not paid for for three whole terms, and the hateful Harpies make you into a regular drudge—a pupil-teacher, a nursery governess, a servant! You sleep in the attic with those odious little Smiths—wash, dress, and teach them; you go messages to the shops, and even into Riverside—you, who were never allowed to stir one yard alone; you mend and darn and teach."

She paused, not from lack of words, but from want of breath.

"And a very good thing that I *can* do something to pay for my living," remarked the other, with composure. "If I could not sew and mend and teach, what would become of me, I should be

glad to know? I could scarcely expect the Harpers to go on keeping me at their own expense; and now I take the fifth class, the little ones' music, and I save a servant for those Indian children, I work for my bread—and I am worth it."

"I should rather think you were," rejoined her listener, sarcastically. "You are worth a hundred a year to them as teacher, besides being dressmaker and nursery-maid. It makes me wild—I feel quite crazy—when I see all that they get out of you, early and late, and the shameful way they treat you! Once upon a time you were 'darling Madeline'—their 'dear, bright-faced girl,' their 'model pupil,' now you are 'Madeline West,' or 'Miss West,' and you are 'slow,' 'awkward,' 'lazy,' and 'impertinent.' Oh dear me! dear me! sometimes I feel as if

I should like to fly at Miss Selina and bite a piece out of her, I am so savage."

"I hope to goodness you will restrain your feelings," said Madeline, with a smile, as she threaded a long needleful of black wool, and commenced on a gaping heel. "The Harpers are only human, after all! It was very hard on them, my father having failed; and all my music-lessons, and painting, and singing, and German, for two terms, had to be paid for out of their own pockets. Signor Squaletti charges half a guinea an hour. Then there were my clothes. I feel hot all over when I remember the quantity of money I laid out, believing that it would be all settled, as usual, by father's cheque at Christmas. There was that white dress for the breaking-up party——"

"In which you made such an impression on the Wolfertons' friend, young

Mr. Wynne," interrupted Florence, with a meaning nudge. "Oh yes, I remember the white dress!"

"Don't, Flo! Your elbow is like a knife," expostulated her friend, with some discernible increase of colour. "As to Mr. Wynne, what you say is nonsense, and you know Mrs. Harper forbids us to speak of—of—such things."

"I know that Mrs. Harper was most uneasy in her mind when she saw him dancing four times with you running—yes, dance after dance—and she came up and introduced him to Julia Flowers' two red-haired sisters, and said that gentlemen were so scarce, and her girls were not *out*, and all that sort of rubbish; and she sent him down to supper with old Mrs. Browne, and she sent you to bed because you looked pale! Oh yes, I saw it all—all. I saw that Mr. Wynne

never danced again, but stood with his back to the wall for the rest of the evening, looking as cross as two sticks. Very likely he would never have given you a thought, if you had not been so plainly and openly banished: absence makes the heart grow fonder! Mrs. Harper put the idea into his head by making such a stupid fuss—and she has only herself to thank. He sent you those flowers, he came to our church, and Miss Selina took it all to herself—the ridiculous old cat! As if he would look at her! She closed on the flowers: much good may they do her!"

"Now, Flo, how do you know that they were not for her?" asked her companion with a smile. "But, don't let us talk about them. It is an old story."

"But I *will* talk about them," persisted

Flo, angrily. "I'll talk about your nice green tailor-made, and your winter coat trimmed with fur, and your opera cloak, and your white dress—*the* white dress, which they took away from you!"

"Well, they had paid for them, you see," rejoined Madeline quietly. "I am glad they did take them—I owe them the less."

"Thank goodness your gloves and boots were too small," continued Flo, in a tone of fervent congratulation, "otherwise they would have gone also. They are rather different from the Harpers' chaussure, which is of the canal-boat type and size. Now I know what pedestrians mean when they talk of 'covering' miles of ground."

"Well, my dear excited Flo, they did not make their own feet," said the other coolly.

"How philosophical you are becoming! Quite an old head on young shoulders! Who made their tempers, I should be glad to know?—or their tongues? Thank goodness, this is my last half! Good-bye to early rising, lectures, scoldings, resurrection pies, milk and water, and rice puddings. Good-bye to Harperton—penitentiary and prison. Good-bye to Harpies, and hurrah for home!"—throwing, as she spoke, a dictionary up to the ceiling; failing to catch which, it fell open, face downwards, with a bang.

"That is May's dictionary, Flo," remonstrated the other. "You will not improve its poor back."

"If you stay here long, Madeline, you will certainly become just as preaching and particular as one of the Harpies themselves. You are tremendously sobered as it is. Who would think, to

look at you darning away so industriously, that this time last year you were the queen and moving spirit of the school; always getting up charades, dances, and concerts, and carrying your point on every question, and figuratively snapping your fingers at the Harpies if they interfered with your schemes—which, to do them justice, was very seldom! Ah! my poor Maddie, since then what a change has come o'er the spirit of your dream! It is terrible. If you had always been a pupil-teacher it would be another matter, or if you had gone to another school, where no one knew that you had fallen from your high estate; but here, the scene of your triumphs, to make the descent to the very foot of the ladder, is—is frightful. I often wonder how you can bear it so well."

"I often wonder too," said Madeline

shortly, winking her tears back with a great effort. "You are not going the best way to work to help me to endure my lot, Flo, raking up all these things. Bad or good, I must submit. I have no alternative—nowhere to go, until my father comes home. The best thing I can do is to be patient, and try and repay the Harpers for some of the money they have expended on me."

"Repay them!" echoed Miss Blewitt, scornfully. "They made a very good thing out of you for nine years—large profits and quick returns. Now, although your father has not sent his usual remittance—is not that the word?—and they have heard that he is in business difficulties, yet I think they might have given you a little more law—a longer day. They might have exercised some patience. You have not heard of your father for

more than a year, have you?" she added bluntly.

"No, not for sixteen months," answered the pupil-teacher.

"But even if he were dead," proceeded Flo, with a fine disregard of her friend's feelings, and an open defiance of the laws of good breeding, such as is occasionally to be found in girls of her age, "you could not honestly pretend to be very much cut up! You have not seen him since you were a small child. You left Australia when you were seven years old. He is a stranger to you."

"A stranger, certainly, in one way; but still he is my father, and I have a presentiment that we shall meet again, and before long," rolling up a pair of stockings as she spoke, and averting her eyes from her outspoken school-fellow.

"Pooh! I don't believe in presentiments. *I* had a presentiment that father was going to give me a cart and cob last holidays, and it ended in smoke. If your father had been in the land of the living, surely you would have heard. I know I am saying this very baldly and plainly, but there is no use in beating about the bush—is there? You must face the position sooner or later."

"You mean the position of being an orphan?" said Madeline, tremulously. "But I refuse to accept that until I have not one grain of hope left. It is easy for you, who have your father and mother and five brothers at home, to talk in this way. Remember, I have only one relation in the world, and when I lose him I lose all."

"Well, all I can say is, that I hope your presentiment will turn out better

than mine! Oh, here are the girls coming back!" she exclaimed peevishly, as a long file of figures appeared, passing the windows two and two. "What a bore they are! They seem to have only been out a quarter of an hour, and here they come marching in, disturbing our nice comfortable little talk."

Florence Blewitt, who so successfully practised the art of plain speaking and trampling on other people's susceptibilities—people were welcome to trample on hers, she declared; she had none—was a short, squarely-built girl of sixteen, with a sharp nose, thick brown hair, intelligent grey eyes, and a very dark skin—a skin that betrayed no *soupçon* of foreign blood, but was, nevertheless, more brown than white. She was brusque, eccentric, clever, and indolent. Florence could—if she would—but she so seldom would.

She preferred the ease of an undisturbed seat at the very bottom of the class to ambitious battlings and feverish strivings for the first place. She was the spoiled only daughter of a wealthy merchant and shipowner, and, being deferred to and made much of at home, was disposed to be both arbitrary and independent at school. Moreover, she was selfish, which is not a taking trait in a young woman's character, and was anything but a popular idol. She would borrow readily, but hated to lend; and the only thing with which she was generous was her advice; the sole present she was ever known to make was her opinion—gratis. Few were honoured by her liking, and if she had a friend at Harperton, it was the girl who sat beside her, conscientiously mending a basketful of most hopeless-looking stockings.

"I wonder what your fate will be, Maddie?" said Flo, staring at her meditatively, and studying her delicate profile, her pencilled eyebrows, her shining hair.

"I wonder too," echoed Madeline, with a profound sigh.

Madeline West had been born in Melbourne, and sent home at the age of seven to Mrs. Harper's establishment, where she had remained for ten years. From a skinny, elf-like, wildly excitable child, she had grown up into an extremely pretty girl, with what the drawing-master termed "wonderful colouring." Her hair, eyebrows, and lashes were dark, her eyes two shades lighter, but it was in her complexion and the exquisite modelling of her head and features that her chief beauty lay. Her head was small, and beautifully set upon her shoulders; her skin was of creamy

fairness, with a faint shade of carmine in her cheeks—a colour so delicate that it went and came at a look or word. She was tall, slight, and wonderfully graceful; full of vivacity, activity, versatility and resource, ready to throw herself warmly into any scheme for amusement or mischief—that was to say, twelve months previously. She was by far the most striking-looking and admired of Mrs. Harper's forty boarders, and, notwithstanding this drawback to feminine goodwill, was a great favourite with pupils, teachers, and servants. Her popularity had even survived that terrible test of altered circumstances—that dire fall from the wealthy Australian heiress to the unpaid slavey of the establishment. She changed, of course, her ringing laugh and her happy air; her merry repartee and snatches of songs

had disappeared with the pretty frocks and hats and shoes which she had loved so well. She was developing a staid, grown-up manner, according to her fellow-pupils; she held back from their advances—abdicated of her own accord, and her place as queen of the school was filled, after a decent interregnum, by a rich Cockney, who was as lavish of her shillings, as she was frugal in the matter of h's, and who, according to Flo Blewitt, was "a harmless, good-natured, vulgar, poor creature."

It must not be supposed that Madeline West did not keenly feel her altered position. Many a bitter tear she shed in secret; many a sleepless hour she lay awake, when all her companions—with only to-morrow's lessons on their minds—were slumbering peacefully in the arms of Morpheus. Every small indignity,

every slighting speech and sharp glance entered as an iron into her soul, but she made no remonstrance or reply; her swiftly changing colour was the sole index to her feelings, and what were a school-girl's—a pauper school-girl's—feelings to Mrs. Harper? To tell the truth, Madeline had never asserted herself even in her days of sunshine. She never could face an unpleasant situation; she put aside a crisis with a laugh or a gay word; her sensitive, luxurious nature shrank instinctively from all unpleasant things. She was a moral coward, though no one suspected it.

The present clouds on her sky had brought out, in an unexpected manner, unexpected depths in her character. Madeline, the humble semi-nursemaid, was an industrious, prudent, self-possessed person, who laboured gravely, doggedly

from morning to night, a totally different girl to the extravagant, generous, easy-going Madeline, the butterfly who had fluttered the happy hours away for nine whole years. She was now at another seminary. Adversity is said to be an excellent school, and offers a fine test of character. Anomalous as it sounds, Madeline West had *risen* to the state of life into which she had *fallen*.

CHAPTER II.

NO NEWS.

THREE months had passed, and still no sign or token from Mr. Robert West. How anxiously his daughter's eyes followed Miss Selina's skinny fingers, as they dealt out the letters every morning during breakfast time — these letters having previously been thoroughly turned over, examined, felt, and even *smelt*, by that lady and her relatives. It was always the same in answer to Madeline's unspoken appeal. "No, nothing for you, Madeline," or, "No letter yet, Miss West," according to the frame of mind

in which Miss Selina found herself. And then Mrs. Harper, who was seated behind an immense copper tea apparatus, would peer round it, with her keen little eyes and bobbing grey curls, and shake her head at the pupil-teacher, in a manner which signified that she did not approve of her at all! As if poor Madeline was not sick with hope deferred, and wild with a frenzied desire to get away and never pass another night under that lady's roof-tree; only there was one big *but*, one immense drawback to her own most eager wishes, she had nowhere else to go.

The Miss Harpers, who were fully alive to Madeline's value, were by no means equally anxious for her departure. She corrected exercises, ruled copy-books, relieved them of several distasteful duties, and took the little ones' music—an agonizing ordeal. She really

did as much as any two paid teachers, and — an ecstatic fact — for nothing! Moreover, they had the delicious sensation that they were performing a charitable action all the time, and looked primly self-conscious and benevolent when their friends exclaimed: "How good of you, you dear, kind, Christian people, to keep that unfortunate Australian girl!"

Miss Selina, who was forty, with a complexion like that of a wax doll who has been left lying in the sun, would sigh softly and murmur the word "duty," when perhaps at that very moment the unfortunate Australian was fulfilling the least agreeable of hers—putting those fretful, ungovernable, sickly little Anglo-Indians to bed—and to sleep.

They were too young for school routine; spoiled, fractious, disobedient,

and mischievous, they were Madeline's almost entire charge. Happy Madeline!

It is winter when we once more enter the schoolroom at Harperton, a bitterly cold day, and the small fire behind the wire screen does not half heat that great bare apartment, with its numerous doors and windows. Those at a distance are "out in the cold" indeed, for a double file of girls is gathered closely round the fender, talking four at a time, and making noise enough for a rookery. This is the half-hour after tea, and exclusively their own; they are indemnifying themselves for many hours of silence and French—which almost amounts to the same thing. Their speech is vigorous and unpolished, for no teacher is present except Madeline —if teacher she can be called. She is standing at a remote desk, mounting

a drawing by the light of a cheap little hand-lamp. The gas is never turned on in the schoolroom until half-past six, because the twilight is so delightful (so economical they meant), quoth the thrifty Miss Harpers.

The coals, which have been angrily stirred up, throw a good blaze, and reveal the faces and figures of the fire-worshippers assembled round the screen, especially the face and figure of Isabella Jones, the present reigning potentate. She has hitched herself up on the edge of the fire-guard, holding on there by the mantelpiece, and from this elevated position is dispensing law, wit, snubs, and patronage. She is very tall and thin, stoops a good deal, and is the proprietor of a tip-tilted nose, a pair of quick little brown eyes, and millions of freckles. She is also the proprietor of a quantity

of pretty dresses, of unlimited pocket-money, a vast amount of self-esteem, and the largest and reddest hands in the room.

Mrs. Harper's seminary is only intended for the offspring of wealthy folk. Izzie's father has made his pile in margarine, and has desired that his daughter may have the best of everything—every accomplishment, every extra, just like a duchess. Izzie has, accordingly, a separate bedroom, and lessons from the most expensive masters; nevertheless, she is far—oh! very far—from being like a duchess. Her education was begun too late; she is naturally dull.

"I say, girls," she is screaming sociably, "isn't it grand to think that in ten days more we shall all be at 'ome?

"'This day fortnight, where shall I be?
Not in this academee,
Eating scrape and drinking tea.
This day fortnight, where shall I be?'"

She chanted in a sing-song voice, more or less through her nose.

"And there is the breaking-up dance," put in one of her satellites; "I don't want to go home till that is over."

"Gracious! I should hope not. What fun it will be," exclaimed Miss Jones. "I hope there will be lots of men this time. I 'inted as much to Miss Selina. What is the use of going to the expense of supper, and us all getting new dresses, just for the day boarders? That's what *I* say."

"What good, indeed!" put in Flo, sarcastically, as she elbowed her way to the very middle of the fire. "But pray do not make yourselves unhappy about the expense of the supper, my dear young friends. It will not concern us. I heard Mrs. Harper telling mademoiselle that they did not intend to have the girls in

on this occasion, gobbling up the ices and confectionery, like so many locusts."

"I did not know that locusts went in for confectionery," remarked Isabella, with a sniff of scorn.

"This marvellous discovery in natural history was Mrs. Harper's, not mine," said Flo, with swelling dignity. "However, the meaning is plain. We are not to sup. We are to 'ave"—mimicking her schoolfellow—"buns and egg-sandwiches 'anded round in the schoolroom, whilst the company are carousing downstairs."

The "take-off" was entirely lost on Isabella, who was far too much impressed with the intelligence to be alive to Flo's impertinence. A dead silence followed this disagreeable announcement, which was at length broken by Miss Jones, who, sliding from the top of the screen in the

excitement of the moment, shrilly exclaimed—

"Well, I declare! I won't stand it! I shall tell Mrs. H. so to her face. Why, our parents *pay* for the supper! Locusts, indeed! My father pays handsomely for extras and everything, breaking-up party and all; and to be put off with a bun! I think I see myself—I just do! Why"—warming with her theme—"supper is 'alf the fun! There are the crackers and mottoes and jokes, and every one taken down by a gentleman, arm-in-arm. I'll go to supper for one, and stay up to the last. I did not get my new pink dress just to dance with girls, and eat an egg sandwich and go to bed. *Rather* not. Leave it to me, girls"—looking round on her companions with an air of friendly encouragement—"I shall have a word with Miss

Selina. We shall all go to supper, or Isabella Jones will know the reason why."

"Oh, you dear, good Izzy!" cried two voices simultaneously. And one continued, "You know you can do anything with Snappy, and if *you* ask, it will be all right. But about partners, I am afraid they will be few and far between; Snappy and Miss Harper keep the best for themselves and their friends. Anything is good enough for the girls. Last time I was thankful to dance all night with a little boy in a jacket; however, it was a shade better than sitting-out."

"There are the Wolfertons," observed Flo, "and they generally bring two or three men. Last year there was Mr. Wynne, who was tremendously struck with Madeline." Then raising her voice, "Maddie, do you remember Mr. Wynne?

Come over here, and let us see if you are blushing."

"Mr. Wynne, Fred Wolferton's friend!" cried Isabella, with great animation. "He is a barrister, and, of course, without a penny to jingle on a milestone —poor as Job. My father don't approve of my getting to know these paupers. You know I'm an heiress"—giggling— "and father says—— "

"Oh never mind your father!" broke in Flo, rudely. "You need not be alarmed; Mr. Wynne won't look at you as long as Madeline is in the room—and perhaps he may not come. Who else are invited— the Sangsters, the Wallers, the Rays?"

"All common sort of people," remarked the grand-daughter of a baron. "Very worthy in their *way*, and well enough for a girls' school breaking-up; but I should not dream of knowing them at

home, or of bowing if I met them anywhere;" and she threw up her chin, and looked about her superciliously.

No one combated this dire announcement; they were all a little in awe of Miss De Ville and her ancestors—especially of the one who had fought in Palestine—and they were silent and impressed, being young. At length a word was whispered, which quickly set every tongue wagging. That magic word was "dress." What were they all going to wear? One lacked new shoes, another gloves; a fan was lent—in prospect—in return for good offices in the hair-dressing line. Amidst this gabble, Isabella's piercing voice was heard high and shrill above all, describing the body of her new pink dress. Madeline had joined the crowd, looking white and cold—and no wonder.

"Keep away your fingers, my dear, if they are sticky," said Flo; "and, by the way, what are you going to adorn yourself in? Your white dress was taken by the Harpies, as most unsuitable to you now."

"I have nothing but my black cashmere," she returned, "and this"—holding out a shabby serge sleeve.

"They really must give you something!" cried Isabella, impressively, "if only for the look of the thing. For the credit of the establishment, they can't have you appear like an old rag-picker."

Madeline coloured vividly. "I don't mind giving you a dress myself, if you will take it."

"Now, I call that a French compliment, Isabella Jones," remarked Flo, with her usual candour, "and you know it. If Madeline has to wear the old black, so

much the worse; but, whatever she wears, she will always look a—*lady*," accompanying the remark with a glance at Miss Jones that gave it point and significance, and made that young person feel that it would be a pleasure to take the big ink-bottle off the chimney-piece, and fling it at Florence Blewitt's solid, square-looking head.

"You need not trouble about my dress, Flo, nor need I," said Madeline, trying to find room on the top of the screen for her benumbed fingers. "Miss Selina told me this morning to practise up my dance music. I am to play——"

"Oh, what a shame!" chorused half a dozen voices. "Saving the usual piano player, and a guinea—the skinflints!"

But human nature is human nature, and not a few of these fair creatures felt

a conviction that Madeline and her pretty face were best at the piano—turned towards the wall—and that it was only fair to give others a chance, meaning their sweet, unsophisticated selves. They had a very distinct vision of the benefit that would accrue to them as a result of this economical arrangement on the part of the Harpers.

"But what will Mr. Wynne do?" inquired Miss De Ville, with the corners of her mouth drawn down.

She was a tall, pale, sandy-haired girl, with white lashes, and a scornful countenance. Madeline's eyes flashed. She was on the point of answering, but the words were taken out of her mouth by Flo, who replied—

"He will dance with you instead, my dear."

"You know we are not allowed to

talk about gentlemen," put in a prim girl, with very prominent teeth and a painfully stiff white collar.

"Bosh!" exclaimed Isabella. "I'll talk of whom *I* please, from the old gentleman upwards. I'll talk of Mr. Wynne, Mr. Wolferton, Mr. Lancy, Mr. Sangster, Mr. Summers, Mr. Ferraby, Mr. Armstrong——"

"*Young ladies!*" said an awful voice that made them all start, and fall away from the fender like a flock of frightened sheep. "What vulgarity is *this?* How often have I told you that I highly disapprove of such conversation! It will come to this, I see"—looking severely around—"you will have no half-hour after tea if you cannot be trusted. I am exceedingly displeased and shocked, especially"—seizing on her scapegoat—"with you, Madeline West. You are

old enough to know better, and to have some influence; and to find you in the very middle of all this unladylike chatter, discussing gentlemen, is really too odious. A girl in your position might have a *little* decency and self-respect. I am extremely disgusted with you. Now go; it is quite time the little Smiths were in bed. How is it that you have always to be *reminded* of your duties?" she concluded venomously.

Madeline opened her mouth to speak.

"No answer; you know the rule. Now, young ladies, light the gas, and get to your work."

A great commotion and bustle ensued. Exit Madeline, trying vainly to keep back her tears, and with a burning sense of injustice in her breast. Indeed, for once, she forgot herself, and slammed the door —not violently, but still with a decided

touch of temper. It was a foolish impulse, foolishly indulged.

She was called back, and imperatively desired to "remember who she was, and to walk out of the room quietly, and close the door after her in a ladylike and becoming manner."

So even this slight safety-valve for her feelings was denied to her, and she left the apartment for a second time completely crushed.

CHAPTER III.

THE BREAKING-UP DANCE.

The great day of breaking-up dawned at last. What preparations were made! A cartload of hired chairs for the company was the first arrival; then a consignment of glass and crockery, baskets of hot-house flowers from the friends of wealthy pupils, and finally, in a confectioner's van—the *supper!* Mrs. Harper, her cap askew, her curls bristling, was nearly crazy with excitement and fuss. The Misses Harper were busy, important, and dangerous to accost. The girls, from an early tea, had retired

upstairs to indulge in the next best amusement to dancing—dressing. Oh, with what leisurely enjoyment were heads tired, white dresses donned, and gloves drawn on! How often was the following artful query put with an artless air:—

"You are looking awfully nice, dear! Now, tell me candidly, what do you think of *me?*"

Madeline had no trouble with her toilette. The black high-necked day-gown, with a white fichu and lace ruffles, was all the embellishment within her power; but she was in much request, and very busy dressing and decorating her more fortunate schoolfellows. The bell rang. Down they all trooped, conscious, conceited, coquettish, or careless, and filed past Miss Selina, who held a full-dress inspection in the hall — Miss Selina,

whose face was flushed to the hue of her new crimson silk, flushed to a shade that set pearl powder at defiance, and scorned the application of Rowland's Kalydor. The young ladies passed muster creditably—with some few exceptions, such as "Minnie, your dress is too short;" "Fanny, those flowers are frightful!" "Jocelyn, where did you get such horrible gloves?" The bevy of fair creatures passed into the schoolroom, where, on a raised platform, were seats for the chorus, two pianos, a harmonium—in short, all the preparations for a concert, the one drawback to the young ladies' absolute felicity—that is to say, those young ladies who were compelled to perform, and who now awaited the audience in a kind of cold shiver, with clammy hands and quickly pulsing hearts. Presently Herr

Kroot arrived in elaborate evening dress, frilled shirt, white gloves, and an immense accession of dignity, and talked and scolded, commanded and encouraged, his miserable pupils. Much as they dreaded the audience, they were trebly afraid of him, and dared not break down with his eye upon them, his hand turning over the leaves, his low "counting" in their ears. The large room filled soon, and filled fast, with day boarders, their friends, parents, a few outsiders, and the Misses Harper's own circle—chiefly clerical. There was quite a notable sprinkling of the sterner sex, for Mrs. Harper's establishment was reported to include some beauties. Very nice, indeed, the young people looked from the body of the concert hall, so young and fresh and fair in their simple white dresses, with their downcast eyes—that noted

everything all the same. Among other facts, they noted the arrival of all the Wolfertons and Mr. Wynne, whose presence on the occasion Miss Selina attributed solely to her own attractions. She was fourteen years older than him, but what of that? He was old for his age, and she was young for hers. She flattered herself that in a becoming dress, by lamplight, or behind a spotted veil, she did not look a day more than seven and twenty. By all accounts Mr. Wynne was a briefless barrister (but then Selina's share of the family stocking was by no means contemptible), he had the reputation of being clever, and would "get on" of course. The Wolfertons declared that he was highly thought of as a rising man, and of fine old family—but poor. Strange that he should come to the breaking-up this year too—"made

quite a point of it," Amy Wolferton had whispered, and Amy had looked as if she would have liked to have added more.

As he pressed her hand, and she glanced at him from under her scanty eyelashes, a delicious conviction assured Miss Selina that he had not forgotten her—their charming walk from church, or the little picnic party, at which he had sat beside her, and when the second supply of plates had failed, and with regard to the remains of some cold chicken, said in the most marked manner, "Miss Selina, will you permit me to lay my bones beside yours?" What was this but a proposal? Certainly in a novel form, unquestionably it meant that they would share the same grave. It was a distinct invitation to the family vault of the blue-blooded Wynnes. How

agreeable he was—these barristers always were! How good-looking! What a contrast to Mr. Murphy, the red-haired Irish curate, on whom, with his loud, rich brogue, her sister Letitia had built her hopes matrimonial (N. B. and it had been building on a quicksand), casting a contemptuous glance at the well-oiled red head to her left.

These complacent reflections were chasing each other through the good lady's brain as she sat in the attitude of solicitous attention during the opening cantata. A shrewd, keen, calculating woman with regard to every-day matters, such as school accounts, butchers' bills, extras, and with a lynx eye for the failings and shortcomings of her flock, but where vanity whispered, and a possible (or impossible) husband loomed on her horizon, Miss Selina was a completely

different character, and an absolute fool, as giddy, as credulous, as feather-headed as any of the young ladies meekly facing her behind these sheets of music—nay, worse, for has not every one heard the proverb—"There is no fool like an old one"? Far-seeing, crafty girls were clever enough to discover Miss Selina's weak side, and to use their discovery to their own advantage. They plied her with compliments, ludicrously inappropriate. They called her "their own beautiful Miss Selina," hinted that she had only to come, to be seen, and to conquer, etc., the result being that these wise young virgins were frequently invited to tea in the drawing-room, to supper in Mrs. Harper's own private refectory, were taken to concerts, were "let off" on various occasions, and laughed at "Old Selina" (or Snappy) in their sleeve; called her a

ridiculous goose, as ugly as sin, and as vain as a peacock. It is necessary to reveal the younger Miss Harper in her true colours in order to explain how a woman in her position could imagine for a moment that a young man would fall in love with her elderly charms, in spite of the overwhelming advantages possessed by at least twenty young rivals —her own pupils. She had long regarded the girls *en masse* as her natural enemies, not as pretty creatures of from sixteen to eighteen years of age, with bright eyes, brilliant complexions, and angelic dispositions! She ticketed them in her own mind as disagreeable female children, with loud voices, voracious appetites, and sly ways. Nevertheless, she was reluctantly aware, that Madeline could be no longer considered a child, that some people considered her

appearance pleasing! She stared hard at her now, where her black dress made a sort of blot among the snowy gowns of the first trebles. What a colour! was she rouged? She looked just like a doll. Doll or no doll, Miss Selina made a mental note that she should not be of the happy band who were going in to supper. She might be getting ideas into her mind—foolish ideas. People perhaps would notice her, as they had done last year, and turn her giddy head. The cantata came to a satisfactory conclusion. A fierce, tempestuous bravura, performed with desperate energy by a long-fingered young lady, succeeded it. Poor girl! she was trembling with terror as she sat down. What with the audience before her, and Herr Kroot behind her, she occupied the proverbial situation of being between the devil and the deep

sea, and played with a courage that was absolutely reckless.

The bravura was followed by a duet, the duet by a violin solo, then one or two songs. With regard to the last of these, the miserable performer found her feelings quite too overpowering, and after some gurgling in the throat, and sniffing in her handkerchief, she collapsed into floods of tears, and was briskly hustled into the background and hidden behind the others, whilst, at a moment's notice, Madeline West was commanded to take her place and step into the gap.

Poor Madeline! It had not been intended that she should perform. She had no friends among the audience; no complacent relations to clap their hands and look proud and important. When the last words of "A Finland Love Song" had died away in silence — a silence

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caused by surprise and emotion—there was a pause of a full minute, and then a tremendous hurricane of applause burst forth. Ladies winked away unaccustomed tears, and clapped in a manner that was trying to their new ten-button gloves; their hearts were moved for the moment; some chord had been touched by that fresh young voice, by those sympathetic words, a chord that vibrated, and woke up old memories of the days when *they* were young—those days so sad, so sweet, that were no more.

The men encored tumultuously, not only because the singer had a lovely voice, and sang from her very heart, but—oh, well, because men will be men, and because the girl in black was uncommonly pretty. "Auld Robin Gray" was vociferously commanded, but the fair vocalist was adamant; she only curtseyed

timidly, and curtseyed again. No one but herself had seen Miss Selina's emphatic shake of the head, as she met her cold grey eye in that "little look across the crowd." No, there was to be no encore.

After the concert, the room was cleared for dancing, and Madeline took up her post at the best (the drawing-room) piano and played first a set of lancers, to set every one going, and to polish off the dowagers and duty dances, and then a waltz—and yet another waltz. It was very dull work for her. She was placed with her back to the company, and could neither see nor be seen — which was precisely what Miss Selina had intended; but the pretty singer was not to be so easily concealed. More than one would-be partner vainly begged for an introduction. More than one crafty young

man pleaded *fatigue*, and halted long in the neighbourhood of the piano, where he could obtain a good view of the charming *pianiste*. After the third waltz, played by Madeline's weary fingers, Mr. Wynne approached, and said, as she stood up selecting the next piece on the programme—

"Miss West, we have all to thank you for your capital playing," holding out his hand as he spoke. "And now I hope you will give me the pleasure of this dance?" She touched his hand timidly, and shook her head. "Oh! I beg your pardon!" he exclaimed, with a quick glance at her black dress. "Let me, at least, take you to the tea-room. You must want some refreshment after your exertions."

"No, thank you very much," she answered, once more seating herself at

the instrument. "I have had my tea!"

"You don't mean to say that you are going to play again?" he asked in a tone of indignant astonishment.

"Yes, I am going to play all the evening," she replied, turning over the leaves and finding the place, with a considerably heightened colour.

"But last year you danced all the evening. What does it mean?"

"It means, Mr. Wynne, that I was then one of the boarders; now, I am only a pupil-teacher. Circumstances are changed; it is my duty to play—and," faltering slightly, "I like it."

"I find it difficult to believe that, Miss West," he exclaimed; "but I suppose I must endeavour to do so. Will you permit me to turn over the leaves?"

"No, no!" she protested eagerly; "on no account. You must dance."

"'Je n'en vois pas la nécessité,'" he quoted, seating himself deliberately as he spoke. "I am afraid you have lost a relative," he continued, in a lower voice. "Your father?"

"I have in one sense," now striking up another waltz. "My father has not been heard of for a whole year and a half. When last he wrote he had lost a great deal of money. He was always a speculator. He has never written since——" She paused expressively.

"And have you no friend or relation in this country?"

"No, none that I have any claim upon. I have been at school here since I was seven years old."

"And, good heavens! you don't mean to tell me that you have no resource but to remain on here as pupil-teacher?"

"No other. You see I have no home in this country. I had one long ago in Melbourne—the only one I ever knew."

"Do you remember it?" he asked rather abstractedly.

"Yes, I remember the big white house and the bright, sunny climate."

"Has your father never come home to see you all these years?"

"Never! I'm afraid—I'm afraid——" She paused, unable to articulate, but her fingers still played steadily on.

"*I'm* afraid," he said in a low voice, bending forward, "that you are not happy here," contrasting rapidly in his own mind the brilliant figure she had made last year, as the belle of the evening, the cynosure of all eyes, to what she now appeared, the poor piano-playing drudge, not so much as rewarded with a "thank you," and dressed in a gown

that even *he* could see was shabby and old-fashioned.

"Oh, Mr. Wynne!" said a sprightly staccato voice at his elbow. "Oh! you naughty man! Why are you not dancing? Come away; I cannot have you distracting Miss West's attention, you dreadful person! We are going to have another set of lancers, and you shall be *my* partner."

With this heavy bribe, he was summarily detached from his post by the piano, and carried off by the triumphant Miss Selina (swearing to himself, despite a smiling countenance). Madeline played and played, until she felt that her fingers had no feeling, and were just as stiff and mechanical as the teeth in a musical-box. At length supper released her. She stood up, half expectant, as the others flocked past two and two, each

happy girl provided with a cavalier—beaming, giggling, blushing, as the case might be! Whilst she waited, a bony, much-beringed hand was laid heavily upon her shoulder, and she beheld Miss Selina, who had arrested Mr. Wynne.

"Madeline, my dear," she whispered, "I am sorry there is no room for you. I'll send you out a sandwich, or something." And then she passed on, leaving poor Madeline alone in that big empty room, with a lump in her throat and tears in her eyes.

Miss West was occasionally foolish enough to cut off her nose to spite her face, and she indignantly declined the subsequent sandwich brought in on a plate by the sympathetic parlourmaid, who vowed "it was a shame," but met with no encouragement to relieve her mind further on the subject.

Madeline knew that she dared not go to bed. She had still to play—"it was in the bond." So she had not even that small comfort; nor might she, as yet, indulge herself in the further luxury of a thoroughly good cry.

"What a difference money makes!" she said to herself bitterly. "What a contrast between this night and last year! Who would have believed—I, least of all—that that night twelve months I should be sitting here alone? However, I don't suppose," she added, half aloud, with a catch in her voice, "that any one misses me."

In this supposition she was wrong. Many people missed the girl in black, who had sung *the* song of the concert, who had played unremittingly all the evening, and who had such a shabby dress, and such a sweetly pretty face!

Not a few of Mrs. Harper's guests, who were eating her good things and sipping her champagne, were registering a black mark against her all the same, and thinking that they would be sorry if any friend of *theirs* had to fill the post of her present "pupil-teacher."

Mr. Wynne dissembled—as they used to say in good old melodramas—and was most agreeable to his partner, Miss Selina, but inwardly he was raging. With professional cleverness he drew her out, and cross-examined her with regard to Miss West, and she—her tongue unloosened by two glasses of champagne, her vanity stimulated by his attentions (to her plate)—was completely off her guard, and as easily turned inside-out as any quaking witness at the Old Bailey.

She expounded eloquently on Mr.

West's enormities, the vast sums expended on his daughter, the fact that "but for them she would be friendless and homeless—probably begging from door to door. The wretched swindler was dead, the girl had no relatives or friends, and only for their charity——" Here she paused impressively, expecting Mr. Wynne to fill up the blank, with some neat and appropriate speech; but, for once, she was doomed to disappointment.

"Only for your charity she would be a governess, would she not?" he remarked carelessly. "With such musical talents she is sure of a lucrative situation—a hundred or so a year. But, of course, under *your* roof she has all that she can wish for—a happy home, among her old companions—and any one can see with half an eye that Mrs. Harper is a mother

to her," he concluded with immovable features.

Miss Selina started and became of a yet richer shade of crimson. This idea of a governess, at one hundred pounds a year, was something entirely novel. The girl was clever and accomplished! Was Mr. Wynne speaking ironically, when he alluded to a mother's care and a happy home? Impossible! His face was as unmoved, his eyes as smiling, his manner as sociable and friendly as usual. It was a wild, foolish idea, and she immediately dismissed it from her mind, and plunged into a discussion on platonic friendships—and a second helping of a most excellent truffle.

Mr. Wynne managed to have a few words with Mrs. Wolferton after supper. He stated his case concisely, pointed out Miss West, and strongly

commended her to the kind lady's notice. Mrs. Wolferton was the mother of Fred (Mr. Wynne's schoolfellow, college friend, and chum), and was very fond of Laurence, whom she had known from the time when he was an audacious boy in jacket upwards. As she listened to the sorry history of pretty Miss West, her motherly heart was touched, and she immediately begged to be introduced to her.

"Remembered her well," she declared, "from last year. Hoped she would come and see her during the holidays." And, finally, being a woman who believed in deeds as well as *words*, took off her gloves, removed a jingling bracelet, and seated herself at the piano for the remainder of the night, in spite of Mrs. Harper's horrified face and excited expostulations, saying pleasantly to Madeline, "Now, my dear, my dancing days

are over; yours are just beginning. Go and dance, Laurence; Miss West has not danced a step this evening."

The hint was superfluous. Already Laurence and Miss West were at the other end of the room, and already a very portentous frown had settled deep on Miss Selina's brow; but it availed nothing. The two offenders were dauntless.

Mr. Wynne was a capital partner. He introduced Madeline to various others, who voted the girl in black quite the prettiest they had seen for months, and who were the more eager to make her acquaintance, and to dance with her, from seeing that their attentions were palpably displeasing to the Harper family. Madeline danced until the end of the evening, although Miss Selina had hissed into her ear, as she stood near her, "You are a bold, pushing, unladylike girl."

She knew she would have to pay dearly for these present delights on the morrow, and was resolved to drain the cup of pleasure—yes, to the very dregs! She looked supremely lovely, if slightly defiant; the exercise of dancing had made her eyes brighter, her colour deeper. Mr. Wynne told himself that she was the prettiest—ay, and the nicest—girl he had ever met in the whole course of his life; but he must not lose his head—no, a briefless barrister could not afford to fall in love with a penniless pupil-teacher!

CHAPTER IV.

THE LAST TRAIN.

The holidays commenced. The young ladies went north, south, east, and west to their several homes, and Madeline had the whole big schoolroom, and the much-disputed fire, absolutely to herself. She was monarch of all she surveyed, but she was nearly as lonely as Robinson Crusoe on the desert island. The Miss Harpers were not covetous of her company; nor was she ever bidden to the friendly luncheons or the merry little suppers which repeatedly took place. She, on these occasions, enjoyed (?) a plate of

cold meat, or bread and butter, and a glass of water in the privacy of the schoolroom. There was no necessity, the Miss Harpers averred, to introduce her to their friends. It would be a mistake to spoil her; she was quite conceited enough. But Mrs. Wolferton had no such scruples: she called, she wrote, she persevered, she carried her point. She insisted on having Miss West to spend an occasional day with her. What a contrast to the schoolroom at Harperton House that dainty drawing-room, with its mirrors, pictures, easy-chairs, Persian carpets, exotic flowers, and genial Mrs. Wolferton knitting and talking and begging her "to make herself at home." Then there was a tempting luncheon, a drive, a sociable dinner—which included Fred Wolferton, Mr. Wynne, and one or two others—finally, music and round games,

in the midst of which would come the disagreeable announcement—"A servant for Miss West, if you please." Fred Wolferton and Mr. Wynne invariably escorted her home all the same, leaving her on Mrs. Harper's spotless doorstep; but not coming in, nor making any move in that direction—as Miss Selina angrily remarked from behind the drawing-room blind. Miss Selina had become very "cold" in her manner to Madeline—in fact, she was more than cold: she was actually and actively hostile—and glared at the unlucky pupil-teacher as if she were some kind of poisonous domestic reptile she had nourished in her bosom. Mrs. Wolferton's praise, Mrs. Wolferton's partiality for Miss West, did not please her; but, happily, the old lady was going away to the south of France to escape the east winds, and when she returned

she would probably have forgotten her passing fancy! Miss Selina was good enough to judge others by her own standard.

One day there came tickets for the Theatre Royal at Riverside, for Mrs. and the Misses Harper, and Miss West: with Mr. Fred Wolferton's compliments. He had not left home—and Mr. Wynne was still his guest.

"To go, or not to go?" that was a question which was debated with great spirit in Mrs. Harper's own bedroom. They were only too willing to accept with pleasure; but what about that girl—*must* they take her also? There was no other alternative. If she had only a slight cold, or even a sty on her eye; but, unfortunately, she was never better in her life. They had no excuse beyond their own disinclination; go she must.

Very grudgingly they broke the news to Madeline, as she sat over a slacked-down fire in the schoolroom, dividing her thoughts between a child's story-book and Mr. Wynne—needless to ask which had the largest share. She could not help thinking a good deal of Mr. Wynne. It was wrong, it was foolish! Miss Selina would have declared that it was indelicate! Probably he never gave *her* a second thought. Her cheeks grew hot at the idea; but an inward voice whispered another tale. If he did not think of her, why did he always monopolize her at Mrs. Wolferton's, usurping Fred's place at the piano, why sit beside her at cards? Why had he begged permission to keep a flower? Why had he hinted that only for his poverty he would marry—or, at least, ask some girl to marry him—a girl who had no home? Who could that

be? Dare she breathe, even to her inmost soul, that the girl's name was Madeline West? If he had not thought of her, why did he tell her so much about himself, his dead father and mother, his rich, high, and mighty relations: relations who looked upon empty pockets as a crime; but who patronized him, asked him to dinner, and hinted that if he were to place himself on the cotton or soap markets, where heiresses were plentiful, he might, on the strength of his connections and his pedigree, secure one of these young ladies, and perhaps fifty thousand pounds!

But these suggestions he had not taken in good part, quite between ourselves; and, equally between ourselves, he asked himself what his grand relations would say if they knew he was head-over-ears in love with a pretty little

pupil-teacher—a perfect lady, certainly, and not unworthy to bear the name of Wynne, but absolutely without sixpence? The poor child liked him too—he was sure of it. He could not offer her a decent home—could not presume to suppose that what was barely sufficient for one would afford a comfortable maintenance for two. Best leave her, if he could, in maiden meditation fancy free—leave her for some luckier fellow, leave his heart in her unconscious keeping. This visit to the theatre was to be positively the last meeting he would allow himself; and then for his dismal, solitary old chambers in the Temple, and work. Plenty of work is an excellent and healing medicine for any affection of a sentimental nature, so he had read, so he had been assured, and now he was about to test its efficacy.

The great evening came. With hot and trembling fingers Madeline made her modest toilet, donned her hat and cape, and awaited the rest of the party in the hall in a state of feverish suspense. She had rarely been inside a theatre in her life, and her heart was fluttering with happy anticipation. What a night this would be to look back upon! Henry Irving she had often longed to see, and now she was going to witness *The Lyons Mail* in company with Mr. Wynne. Oh, it was too much pleasure to be squeezed into one evening. If it could but be spread over three or four days, instead of being all compressed into two or three hours!

"Madeline!" said a sharp voice, that startled her from her delightful meditations, "just come into the drawing-room for a moment. I wish to speak to you!" leading the way into that dull

apartment, lit at present by one dim gas-burner, and innocent of such extravagance as a fire. "I wish to speak to you," seriously repeated Miss Selina, "about the preposterous way you are going on with Mr. Wynne! You are really quite shameless!"

"What have I done, Miss Selina? What do you mean?" she asked, breathless with horror.

"What have you *not* done? Flirted with him, run after him to Mrs. Wolferton's, made yourself the talk of the whole place. Even the very *servants* have remarked it. Don't imagine for one moment that *he* thinks of you as anything but a silly chit of a schoolgirl, who is head-over-ears in love with him, and whom he finds it amusing to draw out, and laugh at afterwards with Mr. Fred Wolferton."

"Miss Selina!" cried Madeline, stung to the quick, turning white as death, and grasping the back of a chair for support, as she stammered passionately. "How dare you? How dare you say such things? You know they are not true. I went to Mrs. Wolferton's because she was kind—because she asked me. I never ran after Mr. Wynne—never!"

"And pray what are you doing to-night?" with grim, ironical interrogation.

"If you think that I am running after him in going to the theatre, I can easily remain at home. I"—(oh, what a wrench was this! but her pride was roused)—"will stay at home," removing her hat as she spoke. "The matter is easily settled."

Not so easily as she supposed, for at this moment the sound of loud, cheery,

masculine voices in the hall broke in upon them. The door was flung wide; enter Fred Wolferton, Mr. Murphy—(hush! you must not tell the bishop!) an elderly escort for Mrs. Harper; last, not least, Mr. Wynne. And although Madeline, with considerable embarrassment, firmly and positively assured every one that "she was not going," as she could offer no sane reason for her sudden announcement, and was unquestionably dressed for the theatre, public opinion and public clamour carried the day.

She replaced her hat, in answer to an impatient signal from Miss Selina, and went; but the gilt had been removed from the gingerbread, and all the way in the train—they were ten miles from Riverside—she was pale and silent, and pointedly avoided Mr. Wynne, to Miss Selina's great content. However, Mr.

Wynne declined to be avoided. He ignored Miss Selina's hints, and the vacant place next to her, which she patted invitingly, as much as to say, "Come and sit here, and be happy!" and seated himself at the other side of Madeline, whose eyes were straying over the theatre, and who, once the overture commenced, began to realize that she was enjoying herself extremely, and would not allow Miss Selina's dreadful insinuations to spoil her whole evening.

Miss Selina, with tightly compressed lips and an angry glare in her little grey eyes, was aware that she had been publicly slighted. What is that line about "A woman scorned?" She felt capable of anything. Her rage against Mr. Wynne was as hot and as consuming as her bitter jealousy of Madeline West. Well, they

should suffer for their intolerable behaviour, as she called it, meaning the simple fact of their sitting together, talking with much animation between the acts, and looking supremely happy. Yes, her feelings must have immediate relief. She would find a way to punish them; and, as she sat silent, her eyes fixed upon the drop scene, she was revolving a portentous plan in her own mind—a scheme that would rid her of her ex-pupil, and avenge her on the rising barrister by one swift blow—a scheme that would not be for the benefit of the smiling young couple — no, quite the reverse.

The orchestra was playing a wild Polish dance, its burthen full of sadness, despair, and weird, fantastic chords at one period; at another gaily frolicsome, and full of outbursts of mad mirth — an air that

exercised a strange influence upon them, especially on Madeline, in her present state of highly strung nerves, and repressed mental excitement. She drank in that wild melody; it haunted her as long as she lived. When heard among other scenes, it always recalled this night—this momentous night, the very crisis of her existence. She gazed at the stage, at the big, red, mysterious curtain, the bent figures in the orchestra, the florally ornamented theatre, the gay company, with fans and opera-glasses, and asked herself, "Was it all real?"

At last the play was over; the actors had been called before the footlights and vociferously applauded, and had bowed themselves away. And now people began to move, to look about for cloaks and wraps and overcoats, and to hurry off, as if the place was on fire! The crowd was

great. Outside it was snowing hard, and inside the crush was almost suffocating.

"I'll look after you, Miss West," said Mr. Wynne, eagerly, as they found a footing in the passage among hundreds of the recent audience.

"Very well. Be sure you *do!*" put in Miss Selina, with unwonted briskness. "We are certain to get separated. Look here, Madeline"—lowering her voice suddenly—"meet us at the bottom of the station steps. *You* know the place. Mind you are not late; it's the last train!"

And with this injunction on her lips, she was borne away in the crowd, in her smart, pink opera mantle—once the property of the rich Miss West—and soon lost to sight.

"Let us wait until the rush is over, and take it quietly," said Wynne, struggling vainly to look at his watch. "We

will get a hansom, and be at the station in no time—before them, ten to one—for they are a large party."

Inwardly he marvelled at Miss Selina's arrangement. He was not aware that she had her reasons—well-thought-out plans—and he was too well satisfied to question the matter. After a little, when the crush had lessened, he made his way down to the portico, secured a hansom, and drove with his charge to the place of rendezvous, the foot of the steps—a covered entry, luckily, for the snow was falling thick and fast. They waited—it was bitterly cold—a chill little wind rose, and sobbed and wailed round them. Five minutes, and no one came to meet them. Ten minutes! still no one, and the hurrying crowd that had passed up had now entirely ceased.

"I hope they have not come to grief!"

said Wynne. And, suddenly looking at his watch, he added, "I'll tell you what —we can't wait any longer, or we will miss our train. We must run for it as it is," springing quickly up the steps.

Too late! Too late! The red light of the last train to Streambridge was just disappearing into the big tunnel. What was to be done? He stood for a moment irresolute. Yes; it was the last train, and it was gone. A cab was the first idea. Leaving Madeline, who was benumbed with waiting, and a good deal frightened, he hurried to the cab-rank. It was empty and void. He waylaid a passing cabby, and told him the state of the case.

"Ten miles in deep snow! Couldn't be done, sir, at no price."

The same story was repeated elsewhere. There was nothing for it but to go back

to Madeline, who was now shivering over the dying fire in the ladies' waiting-room.

"Well?" she asked, raising her face expectantly.

"No cab to be had," he rejoined, with assumed *sangfroid*.

"No cab to be had!" she repeated, her eyes darkening and dilating with horror. "Oh, Mr. Wynne, can we walk?" Mad project!

"No. I fancy the best thing will be to stop here all night—I mean at the Railway Hotel—and go on by the first train in the morning. I will go to the landlady and ask her to look after you, and I will find quarters elsewhere. It will be all right," he continued reassuringly. "Are you certain that Miss Selina said the *foot* of the steps?" he asked, as if struck by an afterthought.

"Yes; quite certain," resolutely.

"Here!" he called to a sleepy porter. "Did you see a party looking for people by the last train—three ladies and three gentlemen?"

"Yes, sir; stout old party and two elderly ladies"—(oh, ye gods! if the Miss Harpers had heard him!)—"three gents. They came by the West Street entrance; they *did* seem looking—that is, the gents was—but one of the ladies said you were all right, and bundled the whole pack into a carriage. She seemed in a terrible flurry."

"Well, we can do no good by waiting here," said Wynne, at length. "Come along, there is nothing to be frightened at, Miss West." (Miss West was crying quietly, and very much alarmed indeed.) "You will be back in time for breakfast. It was all an accident—

a misunderstanding, and if there is any one to blame, or to be blamed, you must blame *me*."

"I know they will be awfully angry," said Madeline, turning her white face to his. "I don't know *what* they will say!"

"Not angry, when I have explained everything to their entire satisfaction. I will go security that you will not get into any trouble. I will see Mrs. Harper myself."

And, really, half an hour later, as Madeline sat with her feet on the fender of a luxurious bedroom in the Railway Hotel—a magnificent apartment to her benighted eyes—with a hot coal fire before her, and a cup of steaming coffee in her hand, she began to cheer up, and to take a brighter view of the situation. What harm was it, after all? Missing

a train—nothing so very dreadful. She would only get a scolding, at the worst. Alas! she was but too well accustomed to scoldings!

But Laurence Wynne, as he fought his way to another hotel through the soft, spongy snow, with the collar of his coat turned up, and his head bent against the stinging sleet, looked graver than he had done when he was talking to his late companion. It was an exceedingly awkward business, and he had an uncomfortable conviction that Miss Selina was at the bottom of the situation. She had sent them to one entrance, and arrived at the other herself; had requested them to wait—and miss the train. There had been an expression in her eye that was distinctly hostile, as he had suddenly encountered it over the top of her fan. Selina Harper meant mischief—had laid

a neat little trap into which he had artlessly tumbled. "However," he said to himself, as he entered the coffee-room of a palatial hotel, "half the evils in the world are those which have never happened. No doubt the worst of the adventure would merely resolve itself into a bad quarter of an hour—for him—with Mrs. Harper."

CHAPTER V.

EXPELLED.

The next morning, leaving Madeline at the station to follow by a later train, Mr. Wynne called at Harperton, in order to have a little explanation. The maid's face (she was an old maid) looked portentously solemn as she opened the door; and—oh! ominous objects!—two good-sized basket trunks, and a bonnet-box, stood waiting in the hall. As he glanced at them in passing, some one came out through a door just behind him, and said, in a biting tone—

"Dear me! I am surprised to see

Mr. Wynne under the circumstances; but, as he is here, perhaps he can give an address for Miss West's boxes?"

"May I ask what you mean, Miss Selina?" he said, turning to confront her the instant the drawing-room door was closed.

"I mean," she replied, flushing to a dull brick colour, "that after her escapade of last evening, Miss West never enters this house again—a young lady who stayed out all night!" she concluded with a wild, dramatic gesture.

"But, you know, that was not her fault, Miss Selina. We waited exactly where you told us—at the bottom of the steps—and so missed the train. I could not get a cab, though I did my utmost, the snow was too deep. I left Miss West at the Railway Hotel and brought her from there this morning. She——"

"Oh," interrupted his listener, throwing up both hands, "pray spare me the details! It is nothing to me whom she was with, or where she went. We have quite done with her. It was a planned thing between you, no doubt."

"Miss Selina," cried Mr. Wynne, "your sex protects you! A man dared not say what you have permitted yourself to utter, and do not in your own heart believe. Am I to understand that because, through waiting for you, by your own express direction, Miss West lost her only train home last night, and was obliged to remain in Riverside, you would blast her reputation, and thrust her out of doors?"

"You are!" she returned, defiantly, looking him full in the face with her cold, cruel, little eyes.

"And may I ask what is to become

of the young lady?" he inquired, with a forced calmness that was ominous enough.

"Nay," shrugging her shoulders, "that is a matter between her and you." Then she added, with an evil smile, "She need not refer to us for a character."

"Perhaps your mother will be more lenient," he said, making a great effort to restrain his temper. "Remember that Miss West has no home and no friends. Can I see Mrs. Harper?"

"I am speaking for my mother," she answered sharply. "She refuses to see the girl, or allow her inside our door. There is no use in your persisting—it is waste of time. We are not rich, but, at any rate," choking with excitement, "we have always been respectable!"

"I am delighted to hear it," he replied, making a low, ironical bow; "and

as there is nothing further to be said, I will wish you good morning."

"Good morning!" replied Miss Selina, ringing the bell, and curtseying simultaneously. "You will be pleased to remove Miss West's boxes at once, and inform her that letters from her will be returned unopened"—thereby securing the last shot, and the last word. And Mr. Wynne walked out of the house in a bewildered and confused state of mind, outwardly cool, but in reality at boiling point.

He had not proceeded far when he met Madeline coming towards him, with a terrified and expectant face. Now was the moment for action. His senses were stung to alertness, his mind cleared of misgivings; he made a desperate resolve. She was thrust out homeless and alone in the wide, wide world!

She should share his home, such as it was; it was better than none. She should, an she would, be his wife—and rich in love if in nothing else. Prudence had hitherto sealed his lips—for her sake chiefly. Now that she had no resources, no place open to receive her, he could and would speak.

The first thing he did was to hail a cab, and despatch the man straight back to Harperton for Miss West's luggage, desiring him to bring it to the station.

"Why, what does it mean? Are they so very angry?" she asked with blanched cheeks. "Oh, you don't mean that they are sending me away?" For she noticed that Mr. Wynne looked unusually pale and grave.

"Come down here with me," leading her into some public gardens that they

were passing, "and I will tell you all about it."

The gardens were miserably wintry. Snow lay on the ground, a couple of boys were snowballing, some starving redwings fluttered across the path, a granite-grey sky lowered overhead. Surely it was the last place on God's earth in which to relate a love tale; and the girl herself, what a picture of misery! Oh! thought the young man, if Mrs. Wolferton had but been at home—but, alas! she was abroad—she would have been a true friend to this poor forlorn child. Madeline was, of course, wearing her evening dress, such as it was—at any rate, it was thin. A shabby little plush opera cloak barely covered her perishing neck and arms. Over this was drawn a meagre black cape. On her head she wore a sunburnt sailor hat; in her frozen, mittened

hand she held a fan; her face was pinched with cold, and white with anxiety. No lovely lady-fair was here to woo this bleak January forenoon. And what of ambition—the stern, jealous mistress to whom he was pledged?

"They are very angry, senselessly angry," began the young man. "They won't take you back again, and have actually packed your boxes ready for removal. However, when one door shuts, another opens. There is a home ready for you, Madeline. Can you guess where it is?"

She gazed at Mr. Wynne, and stood perfectly still and very white, with her thin, sensitive lips tightly pressed together, and made no reply.

"You know that it is my home," he continued eagerly. "I need not tell you that I love you, and so well do I love you,

that until now I have never dared even to whisper my love. I am poor, I have my way to make as yet, it may be a life of struggling poverty. Can you share it —will you venture, Madeline?"

The girl stepped back a pace, and suddenly sat down upon an iron garden bench, still silent, and covered her face with her mittened hands.

"Will you not answer me!" he pleaded. He dared not remove her hands, or offer her a caress. The snowballing had ceased; the present scene in real life attracted the two boys, who had drawn near. The lady was sick, or looked like it.

"You do not mean it," she faltered. "I know you are very, very kind, but I cannot accept your pity, for that is what it comes to."

"I solemnly declare to you that it is not," he rejoined with emphasis; "but

even if it were, have you not heard that pity is akin to love?"

"It is utterly impossible," she said slowly. "You are speaking out of the goodness of your heart, on the impulse of the moment. This time yesterday, tell me honestly," raising her lovely eyes to his, "had you any intention of—of—of this?"

"To be truthful, then, I had not."

"There, you see, that is enough. There is your answer," with a quick little gesture.

"No, no, hear me out. It was on your account that I held my tongue. If I had had a decent income I would have spoken to you long ago; but I felt that I had no right to remove you from Mrs. Harper's care without having a comfortable home to offer you. I meant to work very hard and to return next year. Now all has been changed. Circumstances alter

cases. I ask you now, Madeline, will you be afraid to begin with me at the bottom of the ladder—something tells me that I shall reach the top?"

"I shall only be a dead weight and a burden," she replied in a broken voice. She was relenting. Her own heart was an eloquent advocate for Mr. Wynne.

"What will your relations say when they hear that you wish to marry a portionless girl, a—beggar?" she murmured tremulously.

"They will say nothing that can affect us. I am independent. I have no claims on them, and they have no right to dictate to me. By the time they hear the news, we shall, I hope, be married. We have nothing to wait for, and the sooner you have a home of your own the better. I wish I had a sister or some near relative that I could take you to,

but I am almost as much alone in the world as you are."

In the end Mr. Wynne prevailed—was not talking his trade?—and Madeline West walked out of that wintry white garden his affianced wife.

Rash young man! Rash young woman! One would have thought that they had the wealth of Crœsus, the full consent and warmest wishes of tribes of wealthy relations, to look at their faces as they passed through the gates side by side.

Miss West did not feel the snow soaking through her thin walking shoes. No, she was treading on air—had thrown all doubts and misgivings to the winds, and was prepared to make the most of this heaven-sent period. She was about to enter on a new and happy life, believing that, although a poor man's wife, her path would be strewn with roses.

She had about as much practical experience of household cares—the value of pounds, shillings, and pence—as one of the children in the third class at Harperton. As for Laurence Wynne, Madeline was his, Madeline was an angel, young, unspoiled, and unsophisticated, with modest wishes, and a firm faith in him. Their future was before them! It was!

CHAPTER VI.

"POVERTY COMES IN AT THE DOOR."

In a very short time Madeline West was Madeline Wynne. She was married at a little old church in the City, with no other witnesses than the verger and the clerk; and Mr. and Mrs. Wynne spent a week in Paris ere they set up house-keeping, in modest lodgings not far from the Temple, and from which, by leaning well out of the drawing-room window, and nearly dislocating your neck, you could obtain a glimpse of the Thames Embankment.

The good old days, when Traddles and

Sophy lived in chambers, and entertained half a dozen of "the dear girls," were no more. Mr. Wynne was obliged to set up his little tent outside the venerable precincts, in the second floor front of Solferino Place. To Madeline it was a palace, because it was her very own. Here she might poke the fire, alter the arrangement of the furniture, pile on coals, order tea at any time, and go out and come in as she pleased. She could scarcely realize such liberty! Neither could she realize her wedding-ring, and she frequently stared for a moment in doubt when she heard herself called "Mrs. Wynne."

Laurence was not so poor as she imagined, for he hired a piano, bought her songs, flowers, and—oh! joy—three such pretty new dresses; he took her to the theatres, for walks in the parks (when

he had time), he showed her most of the sights of London—St. Paul's, Westminster Abbey, the National Gallery, and the Tower.

He was even extravagant in one line. He laid out for her a reckless amount of shillings and half-crowns on literary papers, magazines, and books. Laurence was fond of reading; she was not, and she little knew how she startled him when she exclaimed, "Besides all the other hateful things you have delivered me from, Laurence, you have delivered me from *books!* I never wish to open one again!"

Now Laurence had been looking forward to introducing his pretty Madeline to all the great masters in English literature, to hearing her fresh comments, to sharing her raptures, to comparing first impressions, favourite pieces, favourite characters; in short, to opening for this

girl of eighteen the portals of a new world. Alas! it soon became evident that Madeline had an absolute lack of literary taste. She had a taste for music, for flowers; a marvellous taste in colours, and in dress; but for reading, as he understood it, not an atom. (At first he had had visions of reading her some sketches and articles of his own, but soon changed his mind, and kept his MS. in his writing-desk.) He read aloud well, and selected, as he believed, gems; but, unfortunately, Mrs. Wynne preferred paste!

Lamb's essays were "quite too awfully dry." Wordsworth was ten times worse —she could hardly stifle her yawns. And even when he was reading "Silas Marner," and, as he considered, George Eliot's masterpiece, he noticed that Madeline was shyly perusing the advertisements in a ladies' newspaper. She

looked so nonplussed and unhappy if he paused and suddenly asked her, "If that was not fine? and how such and such a passage struck her?"

At length he relinquished his efforts. It was time, when Madeline, with a pretty pout, said, "My dear Laurence, I might as well be at school; you are just talking like Mr. Falk, our professor of English literature. Such an ugly little mummy."

"And to whom you never listened?"

"Not I; and I never could remember names, periods, or dates. You must make the best of me. In some ways you will find that I am hopelessly stupid."

In spite of these tiresome readings, Madeline was thoroughly happy; there was not one single drawback, not one little cloud on her sky, if we except an occasionally heavy magazine article to which she was obliged to lend her ears.

And Laurence was happy too. It was delightful to come home those dark, wet nights, and find a kiss, a blazing fire, and his pretty Madeline awaiting him. She was always smiling, always so ready to see the comic side of everything, a veritable sunbeam in that drawing-room.

"Who would be a bachelor?" he asked himself contemptuously, as he watched her flitting to and fro after dinner, pulling up his armchair and filling his pipe. If he had one little *arrière pensée*, it was this, that she would not *always* give him mutton chops, and a wish that her ideas of a *menu* were a little more expansive.

Nevertheless he was perfectly content. He had an incentive to work hard now, and he did work. He was getting known in a small way. He had the gift of oratory, of what is known as legal tact, a handsome presence, and the power—given

to so few—of swaying men's minds with his eloquence, as the flame of a candle in the wind. But, then, he was only twenty-eight—a mere boy in the eyes of the ancient profession, where a man begins to make a start about fifty. Still Laurence Wynne had his foot on the lower rung of the ladder. More than one shrewd solicitor had noted him. His luck had turned; his marriage had brought him good fortune, though it had scared away all his relations, and he had completely dropped out of society.

But this fool's Paradise was not to last—it never does. The angel that opened the gate, and drove the foolish pair out into the everyday, hard, stony world was typhoid fever.

The hot summer succeeding their marriage was a trying one, and in the sultry September days typhoid fever laid hold

on many victims, among others on the hard-working young barrister—seized him with a death-like grip, flung him on a sick bed, and kept him there for months.

The fever was so difficult to shake off, and it had brought so many other ills in its train. Finances were low—as they are sure to be when the bread-winner is idle. Doctors' bills and chemists' bills were mounting up, as well as the butcher's and baker's, not to speak of the landlady's little account.

All the burden now lay upon one pair of young shoulders—Madeline's; and, to quote a homely but expressive phrase, she absolutely did not know where to turn. She had neither money nor friends. Her husband had no capital; his slender fortune had been invested in his education and profession. And as to his friends and his distant connections,

they had disowned him. When they had heard of what they were good enough to call "his low marriage with a teacher in a school," they had washed their hands of him with wonderful unanimity. Society had lost sight of him for months; Mr. and Mrs. Wynne had no acquaintances. Poor Madeline was in terrible straits, but her courage rose with the occasion; she was brave and energetic, and did not sit down with her hands before her and cry.

A schoolfellow of her husband's (another young barrister) came to see her and him, and gave help in the shape of advice, which for once was valuable. They moved to the top story—the attics. (That was a step of which their landlady highly approved.) And he procured some law copying for Madeline—who wrote a clear, neat hand—which brought in a few

shillings, and kept the actual wolf from the door. He sent fish, grapes, and other little delicacies to the invalid, and was in truth that *rara avis*—a friend in need.

He considered that Wynne had behaved like a madman in marrying on nothing; but certainly the girl was an immense temptation—so young, so pretty—such eyes he had never seen—so unsophisticated and fresh, and yet possessing excellent sense and an elastic and dauntless spirit. Here for once was an instance in which poverty had not thrust love out of the window. Strange, but true, their reverses had only served to draw the Wynnes more closely together. They afforded a refreshing study to Mr. Jessop, who was a cynic and a philosopher in a small way, and who sneered and snarled and marvelled. Things had not even come to the worst

with these unfortunate people, not until a third was added to the establishment in the shape of a Master Wynne, who puckered up his wrinkled red face, thrust his creasy fists into his eyes, and made hideous grimaces at the world in which he found himself—and in which, to tell the truth, he was not particularly wanted, except by his mother, to whom he was not only welcome, but, in her partial eyes, a little household god!

His father, who was slowly recovering —an emaciated spectre of what he had been—was dubious with regard to the striking resemblance to himself, and frequently wondered in his inmost soul, as to what was to be the future of his son and heir? How was he to be fed, clothed, and educated? Dismal echoes answered, "How?" for the Wynnes were now desperately poor.

I mean by this, that Mr. Wynne's watch had long been ticketed in a pawnbroker's window, that Madeline's one little brooch had gone the same way; also—oh, breathe it not!—her best gown and hat; also Mr. Wynne's top coat and evening dress clothes; that the invalid alone tasted meat—and in scanty portions—Madeline telling many clever fibs with regard to her own dinner. Her inexhaustible spirits and vivacity seemed to sustain her—that, and a little bread and tea.

The one person who was well-to-do was the baby. He was clothed in a beautiful cloak and hood—Mr. Jessop's gifts—purchased, with many blushes, by that keen-eyed, close-shaven gentleman, and presented with pride to his godson and namesake. More than once Madeline's mental eye had seen these

sumptuous garments smuggled away to the pawnbroker's round the corner, but she fought hard with the idea, and had sternly kept it at bay—as yet. Their circumstances were, indeed, all but desperate, when one evening Mr. Jessop came thundering up the stairs, newspaper in hand, and panted out, as he threw himself into the nearest chair and took off his hat—

"I say, Mrs. Wynne, what was your name before you were married?"

"My name," she echoed, looking blankly at him, for she was trying to keep the baby quiet and to do some copying simultaneously—vain and exasperating task—"was West—Madeline West."

"Ah! I thought so!" he cried triumphantly, clearing his throat and unfolding his paper with a flourish.

"Then just listen to this:—'MADELINE WEST.—If this should meet the eye of Madeline Sidney West, she is earnestly implored to communicate with Mrs. H. of H. House, at once, when she will hear of something greatly to her advantage.' Now what do you think of that?" he demanded of his friend, who, drawn up near a handful of cinders, had been poring over a law book. "Looks like a legacy, doesn't it?"

"Too good to be true, I'm afraid. Eh, Madeline?"

Madeline turned her face alternately on the two men. A faint colour had invaded her thin, white cheeks, and her eyes brightened as she said—

"There is no harm in answering the notice; it may mean something."

"Why, of course it does," cried Mr. Jessop, emphatically. "Get a pen, give

me the infant, and write a line now, and I'll post it."

And Madeline accordingly sat down and wrote to Mrs. Harper on the spot, whilst her companions watched her in silence.

"Dear Mrs. Harper,

"I have seen your notice in the *Times* of to-day. My address is—2, Solferino Place, Westminster.

"Yours truly,

"M. W."

She was so accustomed to sign merely her initials, and was so flurried between anticipation, anxiety, excitement, and the screams of the baby, that she never had the presence of mind to write her full name, and on this slight omission, this one little cog, turned a most important factor in her future career.

CHAPTER VII.

A TELEGRAM FOR MISS WEST.

The very morning after Madeline had despatched her letter, a telegram was handed in for Miss West, 2, Solferino Place. The landlady herself mounted, breathless, to the attics, with the tan-coloured envelope in her hand.

"I was just for sending it away, Mrs. Wynne," she gasped, surveying her with an inquiring eye; "but it came into my mind as I'd show it to you on the chance."

"Thank you; it is for me," rejoined her lodger, hastily tearing it open and

running her eyes over it. As she read, she became crimson with amazement and agitation. "Come at once—to-day if possible. News of your father.—From Mrs. Harper, Streambridge," was the message.

"But it's for Miss West, and you've gone and opened it!" exclaimed the landlady, suspiciously. "How is that, eh? I never would have supposed—no, never," folding her arms belligerently, "as you wasn't on the square; and as I've allus kep' a respectable 'ouse, I couldn't think——"

"You need *not* think, Mrs. Kane; you need not alarm yourself about the matter, it is all quite right. I *am* Mrs. Wynne, but I was Miss West once upon a time. The sender of the message does not know that I am married," interrupted Madeline, speaking with studied composure—

though her heart was beating fearfully fast.

Insolent as Mrs. Kane was, she dared not quarrel with her. Her roof covered them on sufferance. Were she to thrust them forth, where were they to go? They were entirely at her mercy, for they owed her money; and latterly she had been inclined to take out a large amount of interest in rude insolence, biting gibes, and unpleasant hints with regard to "paupers a coming and settling down on poor, honest, hard-working people — paupers as could afford dress, and theatres, and pianos once, and saved nothing for a rainy day!"

Paupers—impecunious people like the Wynnes, especially Mrs. Wynne, who bore the brunt of these encounters—could not afford to stand on their dignity, and be independent and "move on."

They must submit humbly; but it was insufferably galling—as galling to Madeline as Miss Selina's yoke, that had pressed upon her so sorely but one little year ago.

Who but herself knew with what deprecating eyes and voice she had pleaded with her impatient landlady for a little time, how humbly she ventured to ask for coals, how stealthily she crept up and down stairs, carrying baby, and doing her own miserable errands, making her presence as unobtrusive as possible, for fear of offending her hostess's threatening eyes.

The hostess's threatening eyes were fixed upon her now, with a look that was an insult, as she listened to her hurried explanation with a down-drawn lip.

"Oh, well, I suppose, as I know no *better*, I must believe you," and with

a noisy sniff that intimated quite the reverse, Mrs. Kane glared once round their squalid sitting-room, to see if anything were broken or missing, or the valuable property damaged in any way; and, failing to discover the smallest pretext for complaint, passed out of the apartment with a heavy and aggressive strut, and banged the door behind her.

Madeline lost not a second in rushing to the invalid with the great news, and placing the slip of pink paper in his hand.

"There is something at last! I feel that a change is coming; these terrible days cannot—cannot go on for ever. I believe my father is alive, and coming home! What do you think, Laurence?" she asked, and her voice trembled.

Laurence, still holding the telegram in his thin, transparent hand, gazed at his

wife for some seconds in silence. How changed she was, he thought, with a pang of self-reproach. She was shabby — very genteelly shabby. Her black dress was all mended and pieced, her face was haggard, her eyes sunken, their look eager, anxious, almost desperate.

An intelligent spectator would have declared that she was obviously half-starved, and so she was. But how furiously she would have disclaimed such a pronouncement. She would rather have died than have admitted that truth. As long as Laurence had meat once a day, as long as baby had milk, she did very well on anything, and anything may mean almost nothing—it is an elastic word. Meanwhile, Laurence had been telling himself that he had been a culpable wretch to marry Madeline West. What would he say to her father when

he placed his daughter in his arms—a daughter in all but rags, with a face pinched with famine, without a friend, without a penny, and weighted with a dying husband and a peculiarly ill-tempered baby?

How much better would it have been if he had curbed his foolish fancy—nipped it in the bud, and left Madeline to her fate. Why had he not wired to Mrs. Wolferton? What would her father say? Would he cast her off?

Madeline had hinted that, as well as she could judge her father from his letters, he was fond of show and style and great people. He wished her to dance and sing and play well, and to speak French; but he had never said a word about literature, or the English classics, or what Laurence called "the higher education of women." On the

other hand, he hoped that she would always make acquaintance with girls her equals, or even superiors, and never lower herself by school-friendships that it would be impossible for him to recognize. Madeline had once innocently repeated this to her husband verbatim, and it came vividly before him now. Madeline had done more than form a friendship of which her aspiring parent would disapprove, a friendship that could be slipped out of like an old glove. Here she was tied for life to a poor man, whose only career seemed likely to be that of an invalid—a stone round her neck as long as he lived.

He had but faint hopes of his own recovery; everything was against it. He knew that this could not be helped, and he was very patient. If he had good wine, wholesome delicacies to tempt his

appetite, instead of gruesome scraps of stale, ill-cooked meat and poisonous port at a shilling; if he could have a change to pure, invigorating air, he might yet have a chance. And he knew that he might as well long for the moon—for the entire firmament!

"What is to be done, Laurence?" asked Madeline, rather surprised at his long silence. "What do you think of it?"

"You must go, of course," he returned at last. "Go to-day."

"To-day! My dear Laurence, what are you thinking of?" sitting down on a rush chair as she spoke, and staring at him in amazement. "Where is the money to come from? Look here," producing a shabby little purse, with a brass clasp, and turning out the pitiably small contents, "all I possess is two and sevenpence."

"Still you must go, Maddie, by hook or crook; much may depend on it. A return third-class——"

"A return third-class would be twenty-two shillings—one pound two," she interrupted. "And, besides, I could not go in this," looking down at her gown; "now," appealingly, "could I?"

"No, you could not," he replied, with a little flush on his pale face. "And you must get something out. To get something out something else must go in. And," speaking with an effort, "I never thought to part with them, but they could not go in a better cause. I mean," wiping his damp forehead, "my mother's miniature and my father's medals. The miniature is framed in seed pearls; the back is gold—it ought to fetch a couple of pounds. It's in my desk, Maddie, in a little morocco case." There were other

things in his desk—neatly-copied-out manuscripts. These, alas! were valueless—he had proved them. "Take it, my dear, and welcome; and the medals—they will fetch a few shillings."

"Oh, Laurence," suddenly kneeling down beside him, "I don't like to! Must I really? I know you think so much of them. They are the only relics you possess. No, no; I really can't!"

"Yes, you can, and you shall," said the sick man, with sudden decision. "Here, at last, is an opening for you, my poor Maddie. Something tells me that your father is alive—is coming home rich. You are his only child, his heiress. You will be looked after and cherished when I am gone. Yes, my dear, it will be best for you in the end. It was most wicked of me to marry you. I see it all now, only too plainly. I

had put by nothing for such a strait, and I had no wealthy friends. But I never dreamt that it would come to this, Maddie; believe me, I never did. Forgive me!" he urged, and tears, born of weakness and remorse, stood in his hollow eyes.

"Laurence!" she interrupted, attempting to place her hand on his mouth.

"I should have walked home in the snow that night; I should have taken you to the Wolfertons' house, and telegraphed for her; I should have gone to the parish clergyman—done anything but what I did, and which led to my dragging you into such a pit as this!" with an inclusive wave of his hand and a glance round the mean little attic. "But it won't be for long now," he added in a lower voice.

"Oh, Laurence," she almost screamed as she seized his arm, "why are you

telling me such terrible things, when we have a little gleam of hope at last? It is cruel—cruel of you. You couldn't mean that, after all we have gone through together—that when we are approaching smooth water — you — you would leave me!"

And here she suddenly broke down and burst into tears, for, alas! she had an agonizing inward conviction that there was truth in what he said. How pale and thin and wasted he looked! No one would recognize him who had seen him last year, with his shorn head, gaunt cheekbones, and sunken eyes; and she had a heart-breaking feeling that it was not mere actual illness, nor the dregs of that terrible fever, that were to blame for this, but that cruel, pitiless, ferocious wolf called WANT. He was dying of the lack of mere

necessaries, and she, miserable woman, was powerless to procure them; and for this she laid down her head and wept as if her heart would burst—her passionate sobbing fairly frightened Laurence. Madeline's tears were rarely seen; Madeline was always bright, cheery, almost gay, at the very worst of times; and now came a reaction, and she was weeping as he had never seen any one weep before.

"Don't, Maddie, don't," he whispered, feebly stroking her hair; "you will be better without me, though you don't think so now. You are young—only nineteen—many bright days may be in store for you. I will leave you contentedly, if your father has come home. The greatest horror I have ever known will be lifted from my mind. You don't know, dearest, what torments have racked me as I lay awake through

the long, dark nights, listening to the clocks striking hour after hour, and wondering what would become of you? Now Providence has answered the question; your father will give you and the child a home. There, Maddie, there, don't; I can't bear to see you cry like this; and I—I may get over it, and—— And now, you see, you have awakened the baby!" as a shrill, querulous cry from the next room interrupted what he was about to say.

The maternal instinct thus roused, he hoped that her tears would cease, as he was powerless to arrest them. And Madeline completely broken down—Madeline, who was always so brave, who had come out in a new light under the scorching flames of the furnace of affliction—was a sight that completely unmanned him.

Madeline hastily dried her eyes, strangled her sobs, took her shrieking offspring out of his cradle, and gave him his midday bottle—an operation which appeased his appetite and soothed his feelings. Then she came back to her husband with the child in her arms, and said in a husky voice, "If you had change of air, good food, properly cooked, fruit, wine, and the little delicacies all sick people require, you would get well —I know you would. Promise me, promise that you will try to get better! Promise me that you will wish to get better, Laurence," she continued tremulously, "for—for our sake."

"I can promise that, at any rate, Maddie," he answered with a dim smile; "but you know the old proverb about wishes."

"And you know that while there's

life there's hope," she answered quickly. "I have hope; you must have hope too! And now I am going out, you will have to mind baby," placing the white bundle beside his father, who eyed his charge dubiously, as it stared at him stolidly, thumb in mouth.

Madeline hurriedly put on her hat and jacket, and, taking a key, unlocked a brass-bound desk, and, after a little search, drew out the morocco case. "Is this it?" she asked, holding it up. "This is what you mean?"

A nod assured her that it was.

"You would like to look at it once more," she said, gently laying it in his hand. "I don't know how to take it. You are so like her, too," looking down at the little oval miniature of a pretty, spirited girl with dark eyes and dark hair, and seeing her husband's gaze fixed

greedily on the portrait. "You were so fond of her, Laurence."

"Not more than I am of you, Maddie," he answered, closing the case with a decisive snap. "And my father's medals," he said, as he held them up, and looked at them wistfully. "Well, they will fetch a few shillings, and they go in a good cause. Here, take them, my dear, and go, and don't be long."

Needless to add this formula. Was she ever long? But time passed very slowly when Madeline was absent from those two poor attics which were called home.

CHAPTER VIII.

NOT MARRIED AFTER ALL.

"He has not awoke since, has he?" asked the anxious mother, as, fully an hour later, she reappeared with a bundle and a basket. "No"—with a sigh of relief—"I see he is sound," laying down her load as she spoke. "And now to begin at the very beginning, and to tell you everything, Laurence," opening the basket and producing a bottle. "Here is some good port wine; I've carried it most carefully, so as not to shake it. You must have a glass at once—that is to be the beginning."

"Oh, Maddie, what extravagance! When you——"

"Hush! please to listen," exhibiting as she spoke a bunch of grapes, six fresh eggs, a jar of Bovril, and a packet of biscuits from her seemingly inexhaustible store, and laying them on the table.

"Then you are *not* going!" exclaimed her husband, in a tone of deep disapproval.

"Oh yes, I am," she answered promptly, now opening the bundle, and shaking out a dress that she had pawned, and regarding it with an expression that showed it was an old and favourite friend. "Here is an A B C guide. I go to-night when I have left you comfortable, and baby asleep. Mrs. Kane's niece has promised to look after you to-morrow, and to-morrow night I return, all being well."

"Then they gave you a good price for the miniature and the medals."

"Price!" she echoed indignantly. "They turned the miniature over and over, and sneered at it, and said they had no sale for such like; but they could not say that it wasn't real gold and pearls, and they gave me eighteen shillings, and said it was more than it was worth, and ten shillings on the medals. Medals are a drug in the market."

"Then how—where did you get money for your journey?" asked her husband, in a tone of amazement bordering on impatience.

"See here!" holding up both her bare hands. Very pretty hands they were, but now a little coarse from hard work. "Do you miss anything, Laurence?" colouring guiltily.

"Yes, your — wedding-ring — and

keeper," after a moment's pause—a pause of incredulity.

"You won't be angry with me, dear, will you?" she said coaxingly, coming and kneeling beside him. "It makes no real difference, does it? Please—please don't be vexed; but I got a sovereign on them, and they are the first things I shall redeem. You must have nourishing food, even if I had to steal it; and I would steal for you!" she added, passionately. "I shall only take a single ticket—third class. Mrs. Harper will surely lend me a few pounds, and I will be able to leave ten shillings for you to go on with."

"How can I be angry with you, Maddie?" he replied. "It is all my fault—the fault of my rashness, thoughtlessness, selfishness—that you have had to do this, my poor child! Oh, that snowy

night was a bad one for you! I ought to have left you, and walked back."

"Such nonsense!" cried his wife, whose spirits were rising. "I won't hear you say such things! It's a long lane that has no turning. I think—oh, I believe and pray—that I do see the end of ours! And now there is a nice roast chicken for your dinner. I left it with Mrs. Kane downstairs. She asked me if I had come in for a fortune? A fortune, indeed! It was only three and threepence, but I told her that I believed that I *had*. Oh dear, oh dear, I hope my words will come true!"

* * * * *

Madeline's packing was represented by changing her dress; her preparations were confined to brushing, rubbing, and inking her hat, mending her gloves, which, like the typical landlady, "had

seen better days," and to washing and getting up a pair of cuffs with her own hands.

"You look quite smart, Maddie," said Laurence, as she completed her toilet, and came and showed herself to him.

"Yes; I don't look so very, *very* poor, do I?"

"No-o," rather dubiously. Then he added, with a smile, "No one who looks at your face will think of your clothes; and, indeed, Maddie, it is not fit that such a pretty girl as you are should be travelling alone, and third class, such a long journey."

"Rubbish! rubbish! rubbish!" she answered emphatically. "I'll wear a veil, if *that* will please you; and, indeed, no one will notice me. If they do, they will think I am some poor girl going to a situation. You think every one must admire what you thought pretty, you

stupid Laurence; but I heard Mrs. Kane saying the other day that I'd grown 'awfully plain.' And it's not my face Mrs. Harper will notice—you may be certain of that!"

Ten minutes later she had kissed the sleeping baby, taken leave of Laurence, given many whispered directions to Mrs. Kane's niece, and a whole half-sovereign from her little fund; and then, with a beating heart, started on foot for a distant terminus. No, she would not take even a twopenny fare in a 'bus; she must save every penny, and she would have plenty of rest in the train. And so she had, of a sort, on the hard, upright seat of a crowded third-class carriage for eight mortal hours. There is not much repose in such a situation, nor much sleep to be obtained; and the train roared along through the inky black night, and tore

through small stations with a shriek of contempt that shook them to their foundations, and nearly shook the teeth of the unhappy third-class passengers out of their heads. After a whole night's travelling of this uneasy description, Madeline arrived at her destination—Riverside—and quickly alighted on the platform. One trouble was spared her—luggage.

She went and washed her face and hands, arranged her hair, shook off some of the dust in the waiting-room, invested fourpence in a bun and cup of coffee, and felt herself sufficiently fortified to encounter Mrs. Harper—but not Miss Selina. Another journey by rail, a short walk, and she found herself once more on the familiar doorstep of Harperton House, and rang timidly.

A strange maid (who knew not the delinquencies of Miss West) opened the

door, and was evidently surprised to behold such an early visitor.

She informed her that Mrs. Harper was not down yet, nor Miss Harper, and showed her into the drawing-room, which was in process of being dusted. Here she waited for some time, whilst a sound of hasty footsteps and voices was very audible above her head. She looked around the room, and felt as if she had only quitted it yesterday. And oh! what a gap there was in her life between the last time she stood there, listening to Miss Selina's spiteful remonstrances, and now! But the room was precisely the same. There was the best piano, on which she had had many a music-lesson. There was Alice Burns' big coloured-chalk drawing, Amy Watson's two water-colours; Florence Blewitt's brass work, and Isabella Jones's photograph screen—all votive offerings to

the Harper family, and advertisements to pupils' relatives who came to make inquiries about the school.

Presently the door opened, and Miss Harper—if we may dare to say so—burst into the room.

"Oh, Madeline!" she exclaimed, "so it's you. She only said a young lady. How more than thankful I am to see you!" shaking hands as she spoke, and looking into her face with eager scrutiny. "You are thin—very thin; but thin or fat, you are welcome back. Come up at once to my mother's room; she is dressing. She does not come down early now, and she wants to see you" (here was an honour). "Come, the girls are all in the schoolroom. The breakfast-bell will be rung in ten minutes," turning to lead the way. Then she paused for a moment, with the handle in her hand. "You have

heard about Selina?" she asked, with a red spot on either cheek, and a spark in either eye. "What! Have you *not* heard?" she added hurriedly.

Miss Selina! It was not of Miss Selina Madeline had come to hear; and she shook her head and answered, "No; is she dead?"

"Dead! She's married. She married nearly a year ago," returned her sister, impressively, "Mr. Murphy, the red-haired curate. She—she behaved atrociously. Don't mention her to my mother, nor ask about her, on any account. We don't speak," flinging the door wide as she gasped out the last sentence.

All the reply Madeline made was "Indeed!" But nevertheless she felt a very lively satisfaction to hear that her old enemy was no longer an inmate of Harperton, and had gone away, like herself, in disgrace.

"You will find my mother rather changed," whispered Miss Harper, as she rapidly preceded her upstairs. "She's had a slight stroke. All the troubles and annoyance about Selina were enough to kill her, and she is not what she was. She never comes down till the afternoon; but take no notice."

"Madeline!" cried the old lady, as Madeline entered her room and beheld her propped up in bed, in her best day cap. "This is too good to be true! I scarcely expected it, though I have advertised every day in the *Times*. Come here, my dear, and kiss me"—tendering a withered cheek. The old lady's mind was certainly affected, thought her late pupil. That she who had been so ignominiously cast out should be thus welcomed back, and with kisses, was scarcely credible, unless viewed from the

idea that Mrs. Harper had become imbecile in the meanwhile. But no, the reason of this astonishing change from the frost of neglect to the sun of welcome —affectionate welcome—was a very potent one indeed. It was nothing less than the prospect of a large sum of money.

Since Madeline had been banished, nothing had gone well. Her place had been taken by a governess who had actually required a salary, as well as civility, and had been a great encumbrance and expense. Then came Selina's wicked tampering with her sister's sweetheart, a heart-burning scandal, family linen sent to the public wash, and a serious falling off in the school. Things were going badly. Every step was down hill—one girl leaving after another, and there were many vacant places at the long dinner-table.

At last came a letter—from Mr. West of all people! enclosing a large draft on his bankers, and announcing his return a wealthy and successful man. The draft was to pay for two years' schooling, with interest up to date; but for a whole year Miss West had been elsewhere! How could they honestly claim these badly-wanted pounds? They had banished the man's daughter, and the money must be restored.

Viewed now—in a softer light, through a golden atmosphere—Madeline's deeds were excusable. The poor girl had been Selina's victim, and therefore more to be pitied than blamed. Madeline must be sought and, if possible, discovered and reinstated as if there had been no hiatus, as if nothing disagreeable had occurred. And we have seen the "state of life" in which Madeline had been found.

"Letitia, do you go down now, and presently send up a nice breakfast for two—two fresh eggs—whilst I have a talk with dear Madeline." Thus the old lady, who still held the reins of authority, although she had lost the use of her right hand; and Letitia, having previously rehearsed the whole "talk" with her mother, and fearing that "too many cooks might spoil the broth," departed with meek obedience.

"Take off your hat and jacket, my love, and make yourself at home. I am sure you will not be surprised to hear—yes, put them on the ottoman—that your father is alive and well, and returning an *im*mensely"—dwelling lovingly on the word—"rich man."

Madeline's heart bounded into her mouth, her face became like flame. So her presentiment had come true!

"Ah! I see you are surprised, darling: so were we when we got his letter, a week ago. Here, bring me that case, the green one on the little table, and I'll read it to you at once—or you may read it yourself if you like, Madeline."

Madeline did as requested, picked out a foreign letter in a well-known hand, and sat down to peruse it beside Mrs. Harper's bed. That lady, having assumed her spectacles for the nonce, scanned her late pupil's face with keen intentness.

This is what the letter said:—

"Royal Kangaroo Club,
"Collins Street, Melbourne.

"My dear Mrs. Harper,

"After such a long silence, you will be surprised to see my writing, but here I am. I am afraid Madeline has been rather uneasy about me — and,

indeed, no wonder. I met with some terrible losses in bank shares two years ago: nearly the whole of my life's earnings were engulphed in an unparalleled financial catastrophe. The anxiety and trouble all but killed me—threw me into a fever, from the effects of which I was laid up for months—many months, and when I again put my shoulder to the wheel I was determined not to write home until I was as rich a man as ever. I knew that you, who had had the care of Madeline since she was seven, would trust me, and everything would go on as usual. I had always been such punctual pay, you would give me time for once. I am now, I am glad to say, a wealthy man. Some lots of land I bought years ago have turned up trumps—in short, gold. I am not going to speculate again, but am returning home a millionaire, and Maddie

shall keep house in London, and hold up her head among the best. Stray bits of news have drifted to my ears. I heard a foolish story about some beggarly barrister or curate and her. A school-girl wrote it to her brother; but I am certain it was only girls' tittle-tattle. Surely you would never allow my *heiress* to play the fool! If she did, she knows very well that I would disown her. I am a fond father in my way, and a good father, as *you* can testify, but I'll have no pauper fortune-hunters, or puling love affairs. A hint from you to Madeline, that at the least nonsense of *that* sort I marry again, and let her please herself, will be, at any rate, a stitch in time. She has had a good education. She can earn her bread; but I know it is not necessary to continue this subject. You are a sensible woman; Madeline is a

sensible girl, if she is my daughter. And I have great views for her, very great views. I shall follow this letter in about six weeks' time, and will write again before I leave. I shall come by the *Ophir*, Orient Line, and you and Maddie can meet me in Plymouth. I enclose a draft on my agents for six hundred pounds, five hundred for Maddie's schooling and outfit for two years, and the balance for pocket-money and a few new frocks, so that she may be smart when her old daddie comes home."

Madeline paused, and shook the letter. No, no draft fluttered out.

"I have banked it," put in Mrs. Harper, precipitately, who had been scrutinizing every change in the girl's face. "It is quite safe."

"And now I must wind up, hoping soon to see Madeline, and with love to

her and compliments to yourself and daughters, especially the lively Miss Selina.

"Yours faithfully,

"Robert West."

"Well, Madeline, tell me what you think of that?" demanded Mrs. Harper, wiping her glasses.

"I—I—am very glad of course," she returned, her brain and ideas in a whirl; but now fully comprehending the cause of Mrs. Harper's blandishments and welcome.

"We are so sorry, love, that we were so hasty about Mr. Wynne. It was entirely Selina's doing, I do assure you. I am most thankful to see—especially after your father's letter—that you did *not* marry him after all!"

"Not marry him," echoed the girl,

colouring vividly. "What do you mean?"

"I see you are not married by your hand," pointing a long finger at Madeline's ringless member. "Is not that sufficient proof?" she asked sharply.

Madeline was suddenly aware that she was at a crisis—a great moral crisis—in her life, when she must take action at once, an action that meant much. Her father's letter, Mrs. Harper's conclusion, her own dire want, all prompted the quick decision made on the instant. She would for the present temporise—at least till she had met her father, told him her story in her own way, and accomplished a full pardon. To declare *now* that she was a wife would be ruin—ruin to her, death to Laurence, for of course her father would cut her off with a shilling. She was aware that he had very strong

prejudices, a grotesque adoration for rank and success, and a corresponding abhorrence of those who were poor, needy, and obscure; also that he was a man of his word. This she had gleaned out in Australia when but seven years of age. They had lived in a splendid mansion in Toorak, the most fashionable suburb of Melbourne, and an elderly reduced Englishwoman had been her governess. But because she had permitted her to play with some children whose father was in difficulties, who was socially ostracised, she had been discharged at a week's notice, and Madeline had been despatched to England. Her father was peculiar—yes. In a second her mind was resolved, and, with hands that shook as she folded up the crackling foreign notepaper, she reassumed the character of Miss West!

CHAPTER IX.

BARGAINING.

"You see, my love," proceeded Mrs. Harper, in a smooth, insinuating tone, "it is not *every one* who would take you back under the circumstances;" and she paused, and peered at the girl over her spectacles with a significant air. (The circumstances of five hundred pounds, thought her listener bitterly.) "Will you give me your word of honour that you have not been doing anything—unbecoming — anything that — that — would reflect on your reputation? My dear, you need not look so red and

indignant. I'm only an old woman. I mean no offence."

"I have done nothing to be ashamed of, or which I shall ever blush for or regret," rejoined Madeline, impressively; "and to that I can give my word of honour. But, Mrs. Harper, you ask strange questions—and I am no longer at school."

"Well, well, my dear—well, well; we *did* hear that you were in the mantle department at Marshall and Snelgrove's. I believe there are ladies in these establishments;" and then she added craftily, "You have such a nice, tall, slight figure—for trying on things. You were always so graceful, and had such taking manners!"

"I was not there, Mrs. Harper," returned Madeline; "and I cannot tell you where I was, beyond that I lived with a friend, and that I was very poor."

"A friend, at Solferino Place?" quickly.

"Yes"—with visible reluctance—"at Solferino Place. And now what do you want with me, Mrs. Harper?" she asked, with unexpected boldness.

"Well, I wish"—clearing her throat—"and so does Letitia, to let bygones be bygones; to allow your father to find you here, as if you had *never* been away; to hush up your escapade—for though, of course, I believe you—it might sound a little curious to him. No one knows why you left, excepting Selina—Mrs. Murphy. It happened in the holidays. These girls are a new set, and have never heard of you; and, even if they had, they would not meet Mr. West, as he arrives during the Easter term. Do you agree to this?"

"Yes," replied Madeline, with sudden

pallor, but a steady voice, "I agree; it will be best."

"That is arranged, then," said the old diplomatist, briskly. "And, now, what about the money?—what about that? Shall we keep the five hundred pounds, and give you the balance?"

In former days Madeline would have assented to this proposition at once; but now her heart beat tumultuously as she thought of Laurence and the baby. She must secure all she could for their sakes, and, feeling desperately nervous, she replied—

"No, I can't quite see that, Mrs. Harper. To one year's payment and interest you are, of course, entitled; but the second year I worked for my living—worked very hard indeed. You can scarcely expect to take two hundred pounds, as well as my services—gratis."

But Mrs. Harper *had* expected it confidently, and this unlooked-for opposition was a blow. Madeline was not as nice as she used to be, and she must really put some searching questions to her respecting her absence, if she was going to be so horribly grasping about money; and Madeline, blushing for very shame as she bargained with this old female Shylock, reluctantly yielded one hundred pounds for the year she had been pupil-teacher. It was money versus character —and a character is expensive.

Mrs. Harper, on her part, undertook to arrange Madeline's past very completely, and Madeline felt that it must be veiled from her father for the present —at any rate, until Laurence was better, and able to resume work and a foothold on existence.

She had assured him yesterday that she

would steal for him if necessary. Was not this as bad, she asked herself, bargaining and chaffering thus over her father's money, and dividing it with the greedy old creature at her side? However, she was to have one hundred and eighty pounds for her share. Oh, riches! Oh, what could she not do with that sum?

She was to return to her friends at Solferino Place for three weeks—(she had struggled and battled fiercely for this concession, and carried the day)—was then to return to Harperton, and be subsequently escorted to Plymouth by Miss Harper, who would personally restore her to her father's arms.

After the morning's exciting business, Madeline was wearied, flushed, and had a splitting headache. She was not sorry to share Mrs. Harper's excellent tea, and

to be allowed to take off her dress and go and lie down in a spare room upstairs —a room once full, but now empty— and there she had a long think; and, being completely worn out, a long, long sleep.

After dinner—early dinner—she went out with Miss Harper, and the money— her share—was paid to her without delay. She had stipulated for this. Could it be possible that it was she, Madeline Wynne, who stood opposite to the cashier's desk cramming notes and sovereigns into her sixpenny purse? As they pursued their walk, Madeline recognized a few old faces, and many old places. She purchased a new hat, which she put on in the shop; and she heard, to her relief, that the Wolfertons had left, and gone to live abroad. Some former schoolfellows, now grown up—no young plant grows quicker than

a schoolgirl — recognized and accosted her. These had been day-boarders. They mentally remarked that she had turned out very different to what they expected, and that she looked much older than her age. "She was staying at Mrs. Harper's, was she?"

Before they had time to ask the hundred and one questions with which they were charged, Miss Harper prudently hurried her pupil away, saying, as she did so—

"Least said, soonest mended, my dear. It's well you had on your new hat! Now you had better get some gloves."

She was not quite as keen about the money as her mother, and was inclined—nay, anxious—to be amiable. Madeline West, the great Australian heiress, had possibilities in her power. She was resolved to be friendly with her, and to

reinstate her at once as the favourite pupil of former days, burying in oblivion the teacher interlude.

The girls Madeline had met walked on disappointed, saying to one another—

"Fancy *that* being Maddie West! How awful she looks! So seedy, and so thin and careworn; and she is barely my age—in fact, she is a week younger!"

"And so frightfully shabby," put in another.

"Did you see her dress—all creases?"

"And her gloves!" (The gloves were apparently beyond description.)

"All the same, Miss Harper was making a great fuss—a great deal of her. It was 'dear' this, and 'love' that. She is never affectionate for nothing. I know the old boa-constrictor so well. Perhaps Maddie has been left a fortune?" hazarded the sharpest of the party.

"Her dress and jacket looked extremely like it," sneered number one. "As to her hat, I saw it in at Mason's this morning—I noticed it particularly, marked eleven and ninepence. *That* looks like being an heiress! Oh, very much so, indeed!"

The price of the hat settled the question!

CHAPTER X.

MRS. KANE BECOMES AFFECTIONATE.

Mrs. Harper would not hear of Madeline returning to London by night. No, it was a most shocking idea, and not to be entertained. She must remain until the next day at least, "and travel properly," which meant that Miss Harper herself conducted the heiress to Riverside, and saw her off by the morning express, first class. It was in vain that Madeline protested that such precautions were quite unnecessary. She was anxious to save her fare, and return third; for, even with such wealth as one hundred and

eighty pounds, every shilling would be required. But her voice was silenced. Miss Harper carried the day, took her late pupil to the station, gave her into the charge of the guard, and even went so far as to present her with a two-shilling novel, to wile away the journey (an attention that she hoped would bear fruit by-and-by). But Madeline did not need it; her own thoughts were sufficient to absorb her whole attention as she travelled rapidly homeward. She was sensible of some disquieting pangs when she thought of Laurence. Would he be angry when he heard that his wife had once more assumed her maiden name, and pretended that she was still Madeline West?

No, no; he must forgive her, when there was so much at stake. Her hand closed involuntarily on her purse, that

precious purse which contained the first payment for the fraud, she had been compelled to practise. About five o'clock that evening Madeline's quick foot was once more heard ascending the stairs, and with hasty fingers she opened the sitting-room door, and rushed into her husband's presence. He was up and dressed—(at all but the worst of times he would insist on dragging himself out of bed and dressing)—seated at her table, laboriously doing some copying, with slow and shaky fingers.

It should here be stated, in justice to Mrs. Harper, that she had passed Madeline under the harrow of searching inquiries, and elicited the intelligence that she made her livelihood by law copying, and she was satisfied that it was a respectable employment.

"Ah!" exclaimed the astute dame,

"I suppose Mr. Wynne put that bit of work in your way, did he?" Fortunately for her new *rôle*, Madeline could truthfully reply "No," for it was not Laurence who had been the means of procuring this employment, such as it was, but Mr. Jessop.

"You will give me your permanent address, Madeline," said Mrs. Harper, austerely. "That must be thoroughly understood."

"But you have it already, Mrs. Harper."

"Have you lodged there long?" she asked, feeling confident that no well-known counsel at the bar could outdo her in crafty questions.

"Fourteen months," said her pupil, rather shortly.

"Then you must have been pretty comfortable?"

To which Madeline evasively replied that she had been quite happy. (No thanks to Mrs. Kane.)

And Mrs. Harper was satisfied. She had found out all she wished to know. Madeline's past was as clear as daylight now! *Was it?*

And now behold Madeline at home once more, flushed with excitement, exhilarated by the change, by the money in her purse, and with her bright eyes, bright colour, and new hat, making quite a cheerful and brilliant appearance before the amazed and languid invalid.

He was looking very ill to-day. These close stifling rooms and sleepless nights were gradually sapping his scanty stock of vitality.

"Baby is asleep," she said, glancing eagerly into the cradle. "And now I am going to tell you all about it," taking

off her hat and gloves, and pushing aside her husband's writing materials, filling him up a glass of port, fetching a biscuit, and taking a seat opposite to him, all within the space of three minutes.

"You have good news, Maddie, I see," he remarked as he looked at her, and noticed her condition of suppressed excitement, and her sparkling eyes.

"Good?—news, yes; and money!" pulling out her purse and displaying thick rolls of Bank of England notes, and some shining sovereigns. "Oh, Laurence dear, I feel so happy, all but in one little corner of my conscience, and I'm afraid you'll be angry with me—about something—that is the one drawback! I don't know how to begin to tell you—best begin with the worst. I've gone back to being Madeline West once more; they don't know that I am married."

"Madeline!" he ejaculated sternly. "You are not in earnest."

"Now, dear, don't; don't speak till you hear all. You know how I left, how I travelled with the price of my rings. I arrived, was shown up into Mrs. Harper's own room—where, in old times, girls were sent for to have bad news broken to them. She has had a stroke. Miss Selina is married, and Mr. Murphy is gone. The school is going down. So when Mrs. Harper had a letter from my father, enclosing five hundred pounds for two years' expenses, and one hundred for me for pocket-money, it was a most welcome surprise, and they were anxious to find me, of course"—pausing for a second to take breath. "Don't interrupt me, *yet*," she pleaded, with outstretched hands. "Mrs. Harper gave me papa's letter to read. He had lost

money, he had been ill for a long time, he had no wish to write until he was again a rich man. Now he is a millionaire, and is coming home immediately, expecting to find me still at the Harpers', and still Miss West. I am to be a great heiress. I am to keep his house; and, Laurence dear, he had heard a hint of *you*. I know it was that detestable gossip, Maggie Wilkinson. She had a cousin in an office in Melbourne, and used to write him volumes. And, oh, he says dreadful things—I mean my father—if I marry a poor man, as he has such—such—views. That was the word; and if I disappoint him, I am to be turned from his door penniless, to earn my own bread!"

"As you are doing now," observed her listener bitterly.

"Yes!" with a gesture of despair;

"but what is it—for you and me and baby—what are nine shillings a week? Then Mrs. Harper exclaimed, with great relief, 'I see you are not married!' pointing to my hand; and it all came into my mind like a flash. I did not say I was not married, I uttered no actual untruth; but I allowed her to think so. The temptation was too great; there was the wealth for the taking—money that would bring you health. I said I would steal for you, Laurence; but it was not stealing, it was, in a sense, my own money, intended for my use. Are you very angry with me for what I have done, dear?" she wound up rather timidly.

"No, Madeline. I see you could not help yourself, poor child, with starvation staring you in the face, and a sick husband and infant to support! Your

father has views for you, has he? I wonder how this view"—indicating himself and the cradle—"would strike him. As far as I am concerned, it won't be for long, and your father will forgive you; but the child Maddie — on his account your marriage——"

"Laurence!" she almost screamed, "don't! Do you think the child would make up for you? Am I not doing all this for *you*—acting a part, clothing myself in deceit, for you—only for *you?* Do not tell me that it is all to go for nothing! If I thought that, I would give it up at once. My sole object is to gain time, and money, until you are yourself once more, and able to earn our living at your profession. Then, having done all to smooth the way, I shall confess my marriage to my father. If he renounces me, I shall still have you,

and you will have me. But, without this money to go on with, to get the best advice, plenty of nourishment, and change of air, I don't know what I should do?" And she surveyed him with a pair of truly tragic eyes. "It has come to me like a reprieve to a condemned criminal. Say, Laurence, that I have done right. Oh, please, say it!" putting out her hands, with a pretty begging gesture.

"No, dearest Maddie, I cannot say that; but I will say that, under the circumstances, it was a great, an almost irresistible temptation."

"Then, at least, say you are not angry with me."

"I can say no to that from the bottom of my heart. How can I be angry, when I myself am the cause—when it has all been done for *me?* The only thing is, that there may be difficulties later on,"

looking into the future with his practical lawyer's eye. "There may be difficulties and a desperate entanglement in store for you, my pretty, reckless Maddie. You know the lines—

> "'Oh, what a tangled web we weave,
> When once we practise to deceive.'"

"At any rate, I shall make the best of *my* web," said his wife, springing up. "I am going to take Mr. Jessop into my confidence."

"Are you? Well, I suppose it will be best."

"Yes, of course it will; I am going to write to him now. The very first doctor in London is to come and see you; and, as soon as you can be moved, you go into the country—that I insist upon."

"I go into the country, do I?" with a grim smile. He was saying to himself, as he looked at her eager anxious face,

that the only country he would ever go into now would be down to the old burying-place of the Wynne family. At least his relations could not refuse him admission there, or close that door—the door of the family vault—in his face.

And when he was at rest, under the walls of the old grey church, Madeline, as a widow, would be as much her father's heiress and housekeeper as if she had never been a wife. In fact, her days of misfortune would enhance her domestic worth, at least she had learnt the value of money! As for himself, he was reduced to such a low ebb, mentally and physically, that death would be a release. To return to life—with a capital L—and to take up his heavy load, and plod on and on like an omnibus horse, was not an alluring prospect. Madeline's future was safe, and he would rather be under

the green sod, with all the dead and gone Wynnes—when, after life's fitful fever, they slept well.

It will be seen from this that Mr. Wynne was in a bad way—too weak, too hopeless, even to care to struggle back to health. But Madeline had now sufficient energy for two. Hope pervaded her young veins, decision and prompt action were its outcome, and money was power.

In the first place, she scribbled a hasty note to Mr. Jessop, and begged him to call on them that evening without fail. This she despatched by a little boy, paying a precious sixpence to save time. Then she descended like a whirlwind upon Mrs. Kane, and begged to see her for a moment alone. She had made a bold resolve—there was no alternative. She was about to take Mrs. Kane—the insolent, the red-faced, the incredulous—

into her confidence. She had Hobson's choice, and, in fact, was at her wits' end. Supposing inquiries were made, supposing Mrs. Harper wrote and asked awkward questions, and who so ready to answer them—unless previously prepared, previously bribed, previously flattered, by being let into the secret—as Mrs. Kane?

"Mrs. Kane," said Madeline, knocking at that lady's door, the door of her own sanctum, "I have something to say to you in private."

"Bless me, Mrs. Wynne, how white your face is!" exclaimed the other tartly, having been just about to sit down to her supper—tripe and bottled stout. "Whatever is the matter *now?* Not the bailiffs—that I do hope."

"No, no, no; quite the contrary." Then, struck by a happy thought, "How much do we owe you, Mrs. Kane?"

"Ah, owe me!" rather staggered. "Let's see, thirteen weeks, at ten shillings, is six pounds ten; then the coal—— Here," making a raid on a rickety writing-table, "I have it all down," searching among some papers. "Yes, here it is. Coal, one pound one, kindling wood, matches, postage on a parcel—total, eight pounds, thirteen and sevenpence-halfpenny. Are you going to settle it?" she asked briskly.

"Yes, I am," replied Madeline, now drawing out her full, her overflowing purse. What courage, what confidence were conferred by the very feel of its contents! Mrs. Kane gazed at it with eyes as distended as those of a bull frog, and with her mouth half-open. "A ten-pound note, Mrs. Kane." And Mrs. Wynne tendered one as she spoke.

"So I see," in a milder key. "I'll

get you change, and, though I says it as shouldn't, it's not everybody, you know yourself, who would have—— "

"Yes, quite true, I know all that already, thank you, Mrs. Kane. Never mind the change just now, it can go towards the milk bill. What I wanted to speak to you about is to tell you a family secret—which concerns me."

"A family secret! Laws, Mrs. Wynne!" suddenly seating herself with a plunge, and looking at her lodger with a countenance of gratified anticipation, "whatever can it be?"

"Promise, on your solemn word of honour, not to tell any one."

"Oh, I'm as safe as a church; no one will get anything out of me"—mentally resolving to tell her niece and husband without any churlish delay—"unless it's something not on the square."

"It is quite on the square; you need not fear. Once I was a Miss West."

"So you told me," nodding her head.

"I was at school near Riverside for a good many years. My father is an Australian merchant—very rich."

"Oh, indeed!" in a comfortable tone.

"But for two years he had not been heard of, we thought that he was dead, and I became a teacher at school. Mr. Wynne saw me there, and paid me attention, which displeased Mrs. Harper very much. I was sent away, and we were married. We have been here ever since."

"So you have," agreed Mrs. Kane, as much as to say, "And it's highly to your credit!"

"Well, now my father has written at last; he is coming home, immensely rich. He has not heard of my marriage."

"Laws, you don't say so!" in a tone of admiration and astonishment.

"No one has heard of it, you see. I had no friends. And if my father knew that I had married a poor man, he would be dreadfully angry—at least at first. I went down to Mrs. Harper's; she showed me his letter. She thinks I am not married, for," holding up her bare left hand, "I pawned my rings to pay my railway fare."

"Oh, my goodness! Did you really, now?"

"And she took it for granted that I was still Miss West. I confessed nothing. I told her I had lived here for fourteen months, that I worked at law stationery, and was very poor, and she was apparently satisfied; but, all the same, I firmly believe she will write and ask you all about me. Neither she nor my father

must know of my marriage—*yet*. And now, are you quite prepared? I am Miss West, you know, who has lived with you since last January year. You understand, Mrs. Kane?"

"Oh yes!" with an expressive wink. "A nice, quiet, respectable young lady—never going nowhere, keeping no company, and I only wishes I had a dozen like her. I'll give it her all pat, you be quite certain," said her landlady, rubbing her bare fat arms with the liveliest delight at her own *rôle* in the piece. "But how about Mr. Wynne and the baby?" she asked slyly.

"You need not mention them. It will be all right later on, when I see my father and prepare him, you know. But now I am obliged to keep him in the dark. Mrs. Harper would not have given me my money, had she known. It's

only for a short time that I am forced to resume my old name, and I assure you, Mrs. Kane, that it's not very pleasant."

"Ay, well now, I think it's rather a joke—something like a play at the Adelphi, where in the end the father comes in and blesses the young couple, and they all live together, happy as sand-boys, ever after. That will be your case, you'll see!" emphatically.

"I hope so, but I doubt it," returned her lodger. "I will be content if my husband recovers his health. Money is nothing in comparison to health."

"Ay, may be so; but money is a great comfort all the same," said Mrs. Kane, squeezing the note affectionately in her hand, and wondering how many more of the same quality were in Mrs. Wynne's purse—"a great comfort!"

"Well then, now you know all, Mrs.

Kane," said the other, rising, "I can depend on you? You will be our friend in this matter, and, believe me, you will be no loser."

"Certainly you can't say fairer nor that, can you, ma'am?—though, as far as I'm concerned, I'm always delighted to oblige a lady for nothing, and I always fancied you from the first time I saw you in the hall, and you knocked over that pot of musk, and so Maria will tell you. As for the secret, wild horses would not tear it from me; and I'm that interested in you, as I couldn't express to you, and allus was—you ask Maria—just as if you was my own daughter. I can't say fairer nor that, can I?"

And opening the door with a wide flourish, she waved Madeline through, who, rather staggered by this unexpected compliment, passed quickly into the

lobby, and with a farewell nod, hurried back to her family in the upper regions, and set about preparing tea. She also made preparations for the expected visit of their chief counsellor, Mr. Henry Jessop.

CHAPTER XI.

CHANGE OF AIR AND SCENE.

Mr. Jessop duly arrived, and found, to his amazement, that his fish and fruit had been forestalled; and there were other and yet greater surprises in store for him.

He listened to Madeline's plainly told tale, with his glass rigidly screwed into his eye, his mouth pinched up as if he had an unusually intricate "case" under his consideration.

He never once interrupted her, until she brought her recital to an end, and she, in the heat and haste of her narrative,

had permitted him to know more of their poverty than he had dreamt of.

The Wynnes were as proud as they were poor; the extremity of their straits was kept for their own exclusive experience. Mr. Jessop gave an involuntary little gasp as he listened to the revelation about the pawnbroker, the history of the miniature, and medals, and rings.

"By the way, I am going to redeem them the first thing to-morrow!" said Madeline hurriedly.

"No, no, no, my dear Mrs. Wynne; such places for you are simply out of the question. I will go," protested Mr. Jessop, who had never been inside such an institution in his life.

"No, certainly not; they know me quite well at Cohen's, and you are a stranger. I don't mind one bit, as it will be for the last time; and why should it be more out

of the question *now*, than yesterday? Does money make such a difference in a few hours?" (Money sometimes makes a difference in a few minutes.)

* * * * *

On the whole, Mr. Jessop approved. The scheme was rash, romantic, risky; but it was the only plan he could see for the present.

Mrs. Wynne must take her father in hand, and talk him over. "He did not think she would have much trouble," he added consolingly, as he looked at her pretty, animated face; and he told himself that the old fellow must have indeed a rocky heart if he could resist that. And now for business, for action, for a council of war.

In a quarter of an hour it was all settled, so unanimous were Madeline and Mr. Jessop.

A great doctor, whose speciality was low fever, was to be summoned the next morning. If he consented, Mr. Jessop was to come in the afternoon with a very, very easy brougham, and take the invalid at once to Waterloo station, and by rail and carriage to a farm house that he knew of, about fifty miles from London, where there was pure air, pure milk, and every incentive to health. The baby and Madeline were to follow the next day, after everything had been packed up and stored with Mrs. Kane, who was now amenable to anything, and amiable to imbecility.

The prescribed journey did take place by luxurious and easy stages, and actually the next night Mr. Wynne passed under the red-tiled roof of the farm in Hampshire. He was worn out by fatigue, and slept well—slept till the crowing of the cocks and the lowing of the cows had announced,

long previously, that the day was commenced for them. He sat in a lattice-paned sitting-room, looking into a sunny old-fashioned garden (filled in summer with hollyhocks, sunflowers, roses, and lavender, and many sweet-scented flowers well beloved of bees), and felt better already, and made an excellent early dinner, although his portly hostess declared, as she carried the dishes into the kitchen, "that the poor sick gentleman—and ay, deary me, he do look bad—had no more appetite than a canary!"

The sick gentleman's wife and baby appeared on the scene in the course of the afternoon, "a rare tall, pretty young lady she were," quoth the farm folk. A country girl took charge of the infant, who, as long as he had plenty of milk in his bottle, and that bottle in his clutch, was fairly peaceable and contented with

things in general; and was much taken with Mrs. Holt's cap frills, with her bright tin dishes on the kitchen shelves, and with various other new and strange objects.

Madeline was thankful to get into the peaceful country, with its placid green fields and budding hedges; to live in Farmer Holt's old red-roofed house, with the clipped yew trees in the sunny garden, and the big pool at the foot of it overshadowed by elder trees. Thankful to enjoy this haven of rest, away from murky London, with its roar of hurrying existence and deafening street traffic that never seemed to cease, night or day, in the neighbourhood of Solferino Place.

Here the lusty crowing of rival cocks, the lowing of cows, the noise of the churn were the only sounds that broke a silence that was as impressive as it was refreshing. All things have an end.

Madeline's three weeks' leave soon came to a conclusion; and she most reluctantly tore herself away from the farm, the evening before she was due at Harperton. How happy she was here! Why must she go?"

Laurence was better, a great deal better. He walked in the garden, leaning on her arm at first, then in the lanes with no support but his stick. He was more hopeful, more like his former self—he was actually engaged in tying flies for Farmer Holt, as Madeline watched him wistfully, with her chin on her hand. She loved the farm itself—the farmer's wife (kind Mrs. Holt, with a heart to match her ample person). The sweet little chickens, and ducks, and calves, and foals, were all delightful to Madeline, who, active as ever, had helped to feed the former, learned to make butter, to

make griddle-cakes, to milk, and was on foot from six in the morning until nine o'clock at night, and had recovered the look of youth and well-being which had so long been missing from her appearance.

The farmer himself was to drive her to the station in his dog-cart, and she and Laurence strolled down the lane together to say a few last words ere they parted—for how long?

Laurence was hopeful now, and Madeline was tearfully despondent. He was recovering, and felt more self-reliance every day. He would soon, please God, be back at work.

"I don't know what has come over me, Laurence," said his wife, as they came to the gate and a full stop. "I feel so low, so depressed, something tells me that I shall not see you again for *ages*," her eyes filling with tears. "And I feel

so nervous about meeting papa," and her lips quivered as she spoke.

"Nonsense, Maddie! you must never meet trouble half way. Your father cannot but be pleased with you, and when you tell him about me——"

"Oh, but I won't, I dare not at first," she interrupted hastily. "It all comes back to me now. The days in that big house in Toorak, and how I used to be afraid when I heard his voice in the entrance-hall—his voice when he was angry. I used to run away and hide under a bed!"

"Nevertheless you must tell him, all the same; you are not a child now. And when you point out to him that his silence for two years and a half left you to a certain extent your own mistress, and that your unlucky marriage was the result of the reins being thrown on your neck——"

"Now, Laurence!" putting her hand on his arm, "you know I won't listen to that; and if the worst comes to the worst, I can run away *again!*"

"So you can; and I think in another fortnight I shall be fit for—for harness. Jessop says——"

"If Mr. Jessop say anything so wicked, he and I will quarrel!" exclaimed Madeline indignantly. "You are not to do anything for three months; there is plenty of money left yet."

"Yes; but, Maddie," producing some notes, "you know you can't appear before your father like that," pointing to her dress. "You will need a couple of decent gowns; and I don't think much of that hat. You must take forty pounds, without any nonsense, you know."

"No, I won't," pushing it away impatiently. "I don't require it."

"But you do, and must take it, and do as I desire you—goodness knows it's little enough! Promise me to spend every farthing on yourself. You ought to be respectably dressed when you meet your father. Where is your common sense? And naturally he will ask—Where is the hundred pounds he gave you for new frocks? Remember, Maddie, if he is *very* angry, you can always come back to me"—kissing her. "And now that I am not so down on my luck, I feel anxious to work for you, and the sooner the better; and the sooner you return the better. Here is Holt," as the farmer, driving a slashing long-tailed colt, came quickly round the corner into view. "He is driving that crazy four-year-old! I hope he will take care of you. Mind you leave her there safely, farmer," as his nimble wife climbed up into the lofty

dog-cart. "Good-bye, Maddie; be sure you write to-morrow." Stepping aside as they dashed through the gate, carried forward by the impatient chestnut.

Madeline looked back, and waved her handkerchief. Yes, he was still standing gazing after them, even when they had gone quite a distance; finally she applied the handkerchief to her eyes.

"Now, don't take on so, ma'am," murmured the farmer, his eyes fixed on the colt's quivering ears. "We'll take good care of him! He is a real nice young gentleman; and as to baby, I don't see how the missus will ever part with him. You cheer up! Ain't you a-going to meet your father?"

"Yes, Mr. Holt," she faltered; "but I may as well tell you that he has not seen me for more than twelve years. He

—I—we thought he was dead. He does not know that I am married!"

"Oh, great gooseberries!" ejaculated her listener emphatically. "What a taking he'll be in!"

"No, and he is not to know just yet. I am Miss West, not Mrs. Wynne, until I have paved the way. I've told your wife all about it; she knows."

"I don't see what your father can have to say agin Mr. Wynne?" said Holt stoutly. "He is a gentleman. The king himself is no more."

"Ah, yes; but he has no money," sighed Madeline.

"Maybe he has brains; and them does just as well. Don't let your father come between you—you know the Bible says, 'As——'"

"Mr. Holt!" she exclaimed, flushing indignantly, "do you think I would

ever desert Laurence? No, not for fifty fathers. No, not if my father came all the way from London on his knees, would I ever give up Laurence and baby, or forget them for one single hour!"

"Nay, I'm sure you wouldn't, excuse me, ma'am. But, you see, your father's very rich, and you are just wonderful pretty, and when the old gent—meaning no offence—has you living in a kind of palace, with servants, and carriages and 'osses, and tricked out in dress and jewels, and every one pushing and jostling one another to tell you what a grand and beautiful lady you be—why, maybe, *then* you won't be so keen for coming back; you know it would be only human nature—at least," coolly correcting himself—"woman's natur."

"Well, Mr. Holt," she returned rather stiffly, "time will tell. I cannot

say more than that," unintentionally quoting from Mrs. Kane. "I know myself that I shall come back, and soon. Remember," stopping when she had jumped down, and holding his bony hand tightly in both of hers, "remember," she repeated, looking up into his honest rugged face, with dim and wistful eyes, "I leave them in your charge. Don't let Laurence overtire himself—don't let him walk too far. Don't let the baby have a halfpenny to play with again—or the toasting-fork. And, oh, I must go! Remember, above all, that I shall soon return."

Exit Miss West, running to take her ticket and claim her luggage; and Farmer Holt, fearing the effect of the train, for the first time, on his rampant colt, prudently turned his head back towards the cool green lanes without any dangerous delay.

CHAPTER XII.

"SHE WILL DO!"

MADELINE, having arrived in London, drove direct to No. 2, and spent one more night under Mrs. Kane's roof, where she was received with open arms, and proudly shown a letter marked, "Private and confidential," and signed by the neat and respectable signature of "Letitia Harper."

"*I* answered her! Ay, my word, that I did!" cried Mrs. Kane triumphantly. "She'll not come poking her nose after you again. I knew Miss West for a long time, I said, and nothing to

her discredit. She was a most excellent, reliable young lady—who kept herself *to* herself: and should I mention as Miss Harper had kindly referred to me? *That* wor a poser, I can tell you! Back came a letter telling me on no account to say a word to Miss West, and enclosing a postal order for ten shillings for my *trouble!* That was a rare joke! the trouble was a pleasure. And how is Mr. Wynne? and how is the dear baby?" continued Mrs. Kane, whose speech and affection were alike at high tide.

It was evident to Madeline herself that she must get some new clothes. She was not even wearing out the remains of her trousseau—never having had one. What would her father say to her faded cotton, and still more shabby serge? Even the eleven-and-ninepenny hat was now *passé.* Knowing, as he did,

too, that she had the means to dress differently! She must spend money on her wardrobe without delay. Accordingly, after breakfast, she sallied forth, and went to a first-class establishment where a great sale was in its first frenzy. Here, among a mob of well-dressed ladies, she struggled for standing room, and waited for attendance, and saw dress after dress on which she had set her heart snatched away and sold. After patient endurance of heat, tempers, rudeness, and unblushing selfishness, she secured the attention of a harassed girl, who perhaps feeling that she was even such an one as herself, assisted her to choose a neat covert coating, a tailor-made coat and skirt—a model costume of *crêpon*, with immense sleeves and a profusion of jet and black satin trimmings, also a black gauze evening gown—a once-exquisite garment,

but now shockingly tumbled by ruthless hands, though it *was* a "Paris pattern."

These, with a smart silk blouse, a picture-hat, a cape, shoes, handkerchiefs, veils, and gloves, swallowed up twenty-five pounds. Then she returned with her parcels in a hansom, displayed the contents (by request) to Mrs. Kane, and spent her evening in altering the bodices and packing her trunk: it was not very full. It did not need any one to come and sit on the top and press the lock together. Next morning she was *en route* to Riverside, and that same evening in Mrs. Harper's arms!

Mrs. Harper and her daughter were delighted to see her. The house was empty; the girls had gone home for the Easter holidays, and they would be very cosy and comfortable. They asked many veiled and clever questions anent

her money. What had she done with it? Surely she had not spent it *all?* How much was the tailor-made? How much was the black? But she gave them no satisfactory answer. That was *her* affair, and not in the bond!

Days passed, and yet no sign of Mr. West, and Mrs. Harper was becoming a little impatient and irritable. Could he mean to disappear for a second time? What was she to think?

Meanwhile Madeline wrote to the farm daily, posting the letters herself. Here is one of them as a specimen:—

"My dear Laurence,

"No news yet. So glad to get your letters. I call for them every day. It looks funny to see nothing but W. on the envelope, but it would never do to put West, much less Wynne. It makes

me very happy to hear that you and baby are getting on so well and are making the best of this lovely weather. How I wish I was back with you—ten—fifty times a day—strolling about the lanes and fields among the lambs and primroses, instead of being cooped up here, in this hot, dusty suburb. You must not do too much! How dare you walk to the top of Brownwood Hill! It is just four times too far. How could the Holts allow you to be so foolish? But I'm afraid you don't mind *them*. You ask what *I* am doing? I am trying hard to make believe that I am Madeline West once more. Don't be shocked, my dear Laurence, but at times I succeed admirably, especially when I sit down to an hour's practising on the schoolroom piano. I am getting up my music and singing again, and working very hard,

so that my father won't be disappointed as far as my voice is concerned. I have looked over the new books that the girls had last half in the first class—horrible essays and lectures and scientific articles—about the glacial periods, and shooting stars, such as I abhor, and *you* love; but I know that I ought to read up, for I am a shameful ignoramus. I, however, enjoy rubbing up my French, and have devoured several most delicious books by Gyp. Miss Harper lent them to me. She said, now that I had left school, I might read them. I asked her —just to see how she would look—if she had any of Émile Zola's. I had heard so much of them. She nearly fainted, and said, 'My dear, you must never even mention that man's *name!*' I have learnt to dress my hair in the new style. I've gone shopping with Miss Harper.

Altogether I've been very busy, and when I sit in my old place at meal-times, and stare at the familiar wall-paper, and familiar cups and saucers, and when I listen to the Harpers' well-known little sayings and turns of speech, when I look out of the windows, or sit alone in the schoolroom, as I used formerly to do in holiday times, I honestly declare that I feel as if all about you was a dream, and that I cannot bring myself to realize that I have ever left school at all. You see I am naturally a very adaptable creature; I drop into a groove at once, and accommodate myself to circumstances. For instance, Mr. Holt said I was born to be a farmer's wife! I have lived here for so many, many years that I fall straight back into my old place. Then I rouse up and go off to the post-office, when

the second post is due, and receive one of your welcome letters; and I know that I am not dreaming, but that I am actually married. Oh, Laurence, I sometimes look at the Harpers and say to myself—If they knew! I wish that this waiting was over! I wish my father would come! This delay makes me so nervous and so jumpy. It's like sitting in a dentist's drawing-room! I sincerely hope that anticipation will prove to be the worst part of the business. Miss Harper is coming. I hear her heavy step! No—I breathe again. Only fancy, she asked me yesterday, with one of her old sharp looks, *whom* I was always writing to? and I was fortunate to have so many friends—such wonderful correspondents! With a kind of sneer, then, she said, 'I'm going out, and I may as well post your letter,' but I need not tell you that I declined her

amiable offer, and posted it myself. You say that baby screams at night, and must be consigned to an outhouse, if he continues to make night hideous. How inhuman of you, Laurence, to write such horrid things, even in joke! Do you think he could possibly be missing *me*, or is this a foolish idea with respect to an infant of five months old? Ask Mrs. Holt to feel his gums. Perhaps it is a tooth? And now good-bye, with many kisses to him, and kind remembrances to the Holts.

"I am, your loving wife,

"M. W."

Very shortly after this letter was despatched Mrs. Harper received a telegram from the agents to say that the *Ophir* was expected at Plymouth the next afternoon.

What a fuss ensued, what rushing and running and packing, and calling for twine and luggage labels, and leather straps and sandwiches on the part of an excited spinster, who was enchanted at the prospect of a jaunt down to Devonshire — all expenses paid. Once fairly off, and away from her own familiar beat, she was little better than a child. It was not Miss Harper who looked after Madeline, but Madeline who took care of her. At every big station she was seized with a panic, and called out, "Porter, where are we now? How long do we stop? Do we change? Is the luggage all right?" Her fussy flight to the refreshment-rooms, and frantic dashes back to the carriage—usually the wrong one—was amusing to her fellow-travellers, but not to Madeline; and, besides this, her shrill and constant chatter

about "your father," "I do hope the *Ophir* won't be late," "she is a splendid steamer, 10,000-horse power," "and I hope they have had a good passage," made her former pupil feel a keen desire to say something cross, knowing that Miss Harper imagined that she was impressing the other inmates of the carriage, but in reality was making herself supremely ridiculous.

Madeline was thankful when they were safely housed (luggage and all) in the best hotel in Plymouth. Miss Harper had only forgotten her umbrella in the train, and lost a considerable share of her temper in consequence, but a good dinner and a good night's rest made this all right, and she wore a smiling face as she and her charge and many other people went down the next morning to board the newly-arrived Orient Liner *Ophir*.

To a stranger it was a most bewildering scene, and Miss Harper and Madeline stared about them helplessly; but of course the new arrivals were readily singled out by the passengers, and Mr. West had no hesitation whatever in promptly selecting the prettiest girl who had come up the side as his own daughter.

It would have been a severe blow to his penetration and self-esteem had he been wrong, but it so happened that he was right.

And now, before introducing him to Madeline, let us pause and take a little sketch of Robert West, millionaire, who had made considerable capital out of the fact, and taken the lead socially during the recent voyage, from whist and deck-quoits to the usual complimentary letter to the captain. He is a man of

fifty-five, or a little more, short, spare, dapper, with a thin face, hair between fair and grey, quick bright hazel eyes, a carefully trimmed short beard, and waxed moustache. There are a good many deep wrinkles about his eyes, and when he raises his cap he no longer looks (as he does otherwise, and at a short distance) a man of five and thirty, but his full age, for we perceive that his head is as bald as a billiard ball. (N.B.—His photographs are invariably taken in his hat.) He is dressed in the most approved manner, and by the best tailor in Melbourne; a fat little nugget hangs from his watch-chain; a perennial smile adorns his face, although he has a singularly hard and suspicious eye. His history and antecedents may be summed up in a few sentences: His father, an English yeoman of a respectable old stock,

committed forgery, and was transported to Port Philip in 1823; he got a ticket-of-leave, acquired land, squatted, married in Port Philip, now Victoria. His success was fitful, owing to drought, scab, and the many other evils to which an Australian settler is heir. However, he gave his son a fairly good education in England. He desired him to make a figure as a gentleman. To this end he pinched and struggled and scraped, and finally sent Robert down to Melbourne with a certain sum of money, and a stern determination to grapple with and conquer fortune. Privately Robert despised his horny-handed old father, the ex-convict. He hated a squatter's life—loathed dingoes, dampers, buck-jumpers, and wool, and he soon fell into a comfortable berth in a land-agent's office, and being steady, capable, hard-headed (and hard-hearted),

prospered rapidly; in his young days everything in Melbourne was of Tropical growth.

He married a veritable hot-house flower—his employer's only daughter—a pretty, indolent, excitable, extravagant creature, with French blood in her veins, who carried him up a dozen rungs of the social ladder, and brought him a fortune. Her house—in Toorak—her splendid dresses, entertainments, and equipages were the talk and envy of her neighbours and sex; she was in with the Government House set, and she lived in an incessant round of gaiety, a truly brilliant butterfly.

After six years of married life, she died of consumption; and her widower was not inconsolable. He kept on the big house, he frequented his club, he heaped up riches, he gambled with selections

as others do with cards; he was not behind-hand in the great land boom which led to that saturnalia of wild speculation which demoralized the entire community. Suburban lands were forced up to enormous prices—a thousand times their value; people bought properties in the morning and sold them in the afternoon at an advance of thousands of pounds. New suburbs, new banks, new tenements sprang up like mushrooms, under the influence of adventurous building societies, and every one was making an enormous fortune—on paper.

When the gigantic bubble burst, the consequences were terrible, involving the ruin of thousands. Robert West had seen that the crash must come, but believed that *he* would escape. He tempted fortune too rashly. Just a few more thousands, and he would sell out; but

his greed was his bane. He had not time to stand from under when the whole card house toppled over and his fortunes fell.

He was left almost penniless: the banks had collapsed, land and estate was unsaleable. He was at his wits' end. He seriously contemplated suicide, but after all decided to see the thing out—that is, his own life. He went to Sydney; he kept his head above water; he looked about keenly for a plank of security, and providence—luck—threw him one. Land he had taken with grumbling reluctance as part payment of an ancient debt—land he had never been within five hundred miles of—proved to be a portion of the celebrated Waikatoo gold mines. He was figuratively and literally on the spot at once; his old trade stood to him. He traded, and sold, and realized, keeping

a certain number of shares, and then turned his back on greater Britain for ever, intending to enjoy life, and to end his days in Britain the less. Money was his dear and respected friend; he loved it with every fibre of his little shrivelled heart. Ambition was his ruling passion, and rank his idol. To rank he would abase himself, and grovel in the gutter; to rank he intends to be allied before he is much older—if not in his own proper person, he will at least be the father-in-law of a peer. Money for the attainment of this honour was no object; and as his sharp, eager eyes fell on the pretty frightened face that was looking diffidently round the many groups standing on the deck of the steamer, he told himself, with a thrill of ecstasy, "That if that girl in the black hat is Madeline—by Jove! she will do!"

CHAPTER XIII.

MR. WEST'S WISHES.

STANDING close to Mr. West—or, rather, Mr. West had attached himself to him—was his favourite fellow-traveller, a young and somewhat impecunious nobleman—Lord Anthony Foster—the son of a duke, whose pedigree was much longer than his purse, and one of a large family. Most of this family were already established in life, and had repaired their shattered fortunes by a prudent and wealthy marriage; but Lord Tony, as he was called, preferred his liberty. He was fond of sport and travelling, and was

postponing the evil day (as he considered it) which, alas! must sooner or later overtake him, for his private fortune was small. His elder brother, the present duke, was close-fisted, and his personal expenses, do as he would, invariably exceeded his expectations—it is a little way they have with many people—and although he had no extravagant tastes (so he declared), yet he was liberal, and liked to "do things comfortably." In his appearance no one would suspect that the blood of a hundred earls ran in his veins; in fact (low be it whispered), he was a rather common-looking young man —short, square, with a turned-up nose, wide nostrils, a wide mouth, and a faint light moustache; his complexion was tanned to mahogany, but a pair of merry blue eyes, and an open, good-humoured countenance made up for

many deficiencies. He was not a ladies' man, but popular with men; not at all clever, but ever ready to laugh at other folk's good things, and his own mistakes —shrewd enough, too; a capital shot, an untiring angler, an enterprising traveller, and, according to his own account, an unparalleled sleeper. He had no profession, no ties, no landed estates to look after—the world was his landed estate—and he was now returning from a long tour of inspection in Japan and Australia.

Lord Tony had met Mr. West in Sydney society, and Mr. West had taken an immense fancy to him, and had privately arranged the date of his own departure so as to secure the young lord as a fellow-passenger. He had also shared his cabin. In this unaffected young man, with a pleasant, hearty manner, and a large connection in the peerage, he saw

a link to upper circles, and a ready ladder for his nimble and ambitious foot.

Mr. West was determined to get into society, to enjoy his money, to be in the swim, and to make a splash! He had obtained one or two good introductions to merchant princes, and he had cemented a fast friendship with Lord Tony. Friendships grow quickly at sea, though these same friendships frequently languish and fade on shore. He had frequently and pointedly alluded to "his only child," "his daughter," "his little heiress;" he had displayed with pride the photograph of a very charming girl in her early teens; he had thrown out hints, that if she married to please *him*—a nice, unaffected, well-connected young fellow, who would give her a coronet on her handkerchief—the money to spend and keep up her position would be *his* affair.

Lord Tony's married brothers and sisters were continually and clamorously urging heiresses upon his notice; it was "his only chance," they assured him. "He must marry money." If this pretty girl now speaking to West, with visible trepidation and becomingly heightened colour, was the heiress he was always swaggering about and dragging into his conversation, Lord Tony told himself, as he took his cigarette out of his mouth and blew away a cloud of smoke, "that, by George! he might do worse." And so he might. Presently he was formally introduced to the young lady and her companion, and Mr. West, who was metaphorically carried off his feet by Madeline's unexpected grace, was in a condition of rampant satisfaction. *She* would go down. She would take anywhere; and actually,

for a few lofty seconds, he scorned a mere lord, and saw a wreath of strawberry leaves resting on her pretty dark hair.

Miss Harper was not slow to read the signs of the times—to interpret the expression of the millionaire's growing complacency: he found Madeline prettier than he had anticipated; he was greatly pleased; and she immediately improved the occasion, and murmured a few well-timed words into his ear about "dearest Madeline's air of distinction, her exquisitely shaped head, her vivacity, her remarkable beauty; fitted to adorn any sphere; always a favourite pupil; a most accomplished, popular girl;" whilst Madeline gravely answered Lord Anthony's blunt questions. He was the first lord she had ever spoken to, and as far as she could judge, neither formidable nor imposing.

After a little she found herself being led up and presented to the captain and to several of the passengers, with a look and tone that told even Madeline, who had a very humble opinion of herself, that her father was exceedingly proud of her!

Oh, if he would only be kind—only be good to her! if her pretty face, that he appeared to value so much, would but open the door of his heart, and admit her and Laurence and his grandchild! But it would not. Do not think it, simple Madeline; it will only admit you in company with a peer of the realm.

After much fuss and bustle, Mr. West and his party disembarked. Never in all her life had Madeline been so much stared at. And she was not merely looked at curiously—as a pretty girl who had never seen her father since she was a

child—she was doubly interesting as a great heiress, and a very marketable young person. She was not sorry to make her escape, and was conducted down the gangway in a kind of triumphal procession, led by her exultant parent, her arm on his, whilst Miss Harper followed, leaning on Lord Anthony—who was to be Mr. West's guest at his hotel—and I have no hesitation in affirming that this was the happiest moment of Miss Harper's life, if it was not that of her pupil's (as to this latter I cannot speak with certainty). Arm-in-arm with a lord! What would people say at home when she went back? Her heart already beat high with anticipation of the sensation she would produce upon the minds of her particular circle. If one of them could only see her! But there is always an "if."

Mr. West was rather indisposed after his voyage. He could not sleep, he declared; he missed the engines; and he remained at Plymouth for a few days. So did Lord Anthony, who was in no particular hurry. Miss Harper had reluctantly taken leave, and returned to Harperton, endowed with a valuable present "for all her kindness to Madeline," quoth Mr. West, as he presented it with considerable pomp, and this offering she graciously and modestly accepted—yes, without the quivering of an eyelid, much less the ghost of a blush! Perhaps, so crooked are some people's ideas, she had brought herself to believe that she *had* been kind to Madeline—and, indeed, she had never been as hard as Miss Selina. She would have liked to have remained at this luxurious hotel a few days longer. Everything was done *en*

prince. A carriage and pair, a really smart turn-out (cockades and all), took them for a delightful drive. There were excursions to Mount Edgecumbe, promenades on the Hoe. Plymouth was gay, the weather was magnificent, Lord Anthony Foster of the party—and so amusing! Miss Harper was easily amused—sometimes. She threw out one or two hints to Mr. West to the effect that she was excessively comfortable, that this little visit was quite too delightful—an oasis in her existence; that mamma was not lonely—in short, that she dreaded parting with her dearest pupil; but nevertheless she had to go. Mr. West was ruthless, he was blunt; he was, moreover, wonderfully keen at interpreting other people's motives. He perfectly understood Miss Harper. She was, no doubt, very much at her ease; but he owed her nothing.

She had been amply paid; she had had his girl for twelve years, and could afford to part with her young charge.

Moreover, Miss Harper did not belong to the class of people he particularly wished to cultivate—that was sufficient—and he smilingly sped the parting guest, after a four days' visit. During those four days Madeline had been installed as mistress of her father's establishment, and was endeavouring to accustom herself to her new *rôle*. Everything was deferred to her, the ordering of dinner, the ordering of carriages, and of various items that meant a considerable outlay. She took up her position at once with a composure that astonished her school-mistress. She stared at Madeline in amazement, as she sat at the head of the table in her new black gauze, and comported herself as though she had occupied the post for years.

In about a week's time, the Wests (still accompanied by Lord Anthony) went to London, staying at the Métropole Hotel; and here Mr. West, who was a brisk man of action, and resolved to lose not an hour in enjoying his money and realizing his plans, set about house-hunting, *con amore*, assuring delighted house agents that price was no consideration—what he sought was size, style, and situation.

Under these favourable circumstances, he soon discovered what he required. A superb mansion in Belgrave Square, with large suites of reception rooms, twenty bedrooms, hot and cold water, electric light, speaking-tubes, stabling for twelve horses, and, in short, to quote the advertisement, "with everything desirable for a nobleman's or gentleman's family." It had just been vacated by a marquis,

which made it still more desirable to Mr. West. If not near the rose, the rose had lived there! Indeed, to tell the happy truth, a duke resided next door, and an ambassador round the corner. So far so good. The next thing was to be neighbourly. Then there was the business of furnishing—of course regardless of cost. Days and days were spent, selecting, measuring, matching, and discussing at one of the most fashionable upholsterers in town, and the result was most satisfactory, most magnificent, and most expensive. There was a dining-room hung with ancestors—Charles Surface's, perhaps—but certainly not Mr. West's. A full-length portrait of his father in prison dress would have been a startling novelty; there was an ante-room in turquoise blue, a drawing-room in yellow and white, and

a boudoir in rose and pearl-colour brocade. Of the delights of these apartments, of the paintings, statuary, bronzes, and Chinese curios, of the old silver and china and ivory work, and pianos and Persian carpets, it would take a book to catalogue.

As for Madeline, accustomed, as we know, to four Windsor chairs, two tables, a shabby rag of Kidderminster carpet, and a horsehair sofa with a lame leg, her brain was giddy as she endeavoured to realize that she was to be mistress of these treasures, and to preside over this palatial establishment. Carriages and horses found places in stables and coach-houses; a troop of well-trained servants populated the house. There was a stately lady housekeeper, a French chef, a French maid for Madeline, three footmen in mulberry and silver buttons, and

a butler whom one might have mistaken for a dean, and whose deportment and dignity were of such proportions as to overawe all timid natures, and of very high value in his master's eyes.

Madeline shrank from her lady's maid, but she was a necessity—*noblesse oblige*. She did not wish the sharp-eyed Parisienne to spy out the nakedness of the land, as far as her own wardrobe was concerned, and was at many a shift to postpone her arrival until she had garments more befitting her background and her father's purse. Indeed he had not been pleased with her gowns, "they looked cheap," he had remarked with a frown.

"Is that all you have, Madeline, that black thing?" he asked rather querulously one evening, as they stood in the drawing-

room awaiting Lord Anthony, and a friend.

"Yes, papa; and it is nearly new," she said in a tone of deprecation. "It does very well for the present, and I must wear it out."

"Wear out! Stuff and nonsense!" irritably. "One would think you had a shingle loose. I really sometimes fancy, when I hear you talking of the price of this and that, and so on, and *economy*, that you have known what it is to be poor—poor as Job! Whereas, by George! you have never known what it is to want for a single thing ever since you were born. You have as much idea of poverty as your prize black poodle has!"

Had she? Had she not known what it was to frequent pawnshops, to battle with wolfish want, to experience not merely the pleasures of a healthy appetite,

but the actual pangs of painful hunger. Oh, had she not known what it was to be poor! She gave a little half-choked nervous laugh, and carefully avoided her father's interrogative eyes.

"I'll give you a cheque to-morrow," he resumed, "and do go to some good dressmaker, and get yourself some smart clothes. Lady Rachel, Lord Tony's sister, is going to call, ask her to take you to some first-class place, and choose half a dozen gowns. I really mean it; and put this thing," flicking her fifty-shilling costume with a contemptuous finger and thumb, "behind the fire. You are not like your mother; *she* made the money fly. However, she was always well turned out. I don't want you to ruin me; but there is a medium in all things. What is the good of a daughter who is a beauty if she won't set herself off?"

"Do you *really* think me pretty, father?" she asked, rather timidly.

"Why, of course I do! We shall have you setting the fashions and figuring in the papers, and painted full life-size, when you have more assurance, and know how to make the most of yourself. Remember this," now giving his collar a chuck, and speaking with sudden gravity, "that when you marry"—Madeline blushed—"when you marry, I say," noticing this blush, "you must go into the peerage, nothing else would suit *me*, never forget that. Now that you know my views, there can be no misunderstandings later on. Never send a commoner to ask for my consent."

"But, father," she ventured boldly, now raising her eyes to his, that surveyed her like two little fiery brown beads, "supposing that I loved a poor

man, what then? How would it be then?"

"Folly!" he almost yelled. "Poor man. Poor devil! Love! rot and nonsense, bred from reading trashy novels. Love a poor man! Do you want to drive me mad? Never mention it, never think of it, if I am to keep my senses." And he began to pace about.

"But," she answered resolutely, pressing her fan very hard into the palm of her trembling hand, "supposing that I did? Why should I not?—*you* married my mother for love."

"Not a bit of it," he rejoined emphatically, "I liked her, admired her; she was very pretty, and had blue blood—foreign blood—in her veins, but she was a good match. She had a fine fortune, she was in the best set. Her father took me

into partnership. I was a rising man—and—er—I know all about love; *I* have been through the mill! Ha, ha, it's bad while it lasts, but it does *not* last! The woman I loved was a little girl from Tasmania, without a copper. She tempted me mightily, but I knew I might just as well cut my throat at once. No, I married for good and sensible reasons, and one word will do as well as ten. If you ever make a low marriage, a love match with a pauper, or throw yourself and your beauty and your accomplishments, and all I've done for you, and all my hopes away, I solemnly declare to you that I shall not hesitate to turn you penniless into the street. I swear I will do it, and never own you again. You might go and die in the poor-house, and I'd never raise a finger to save you from a pauper's funeral."

He spoke very fast, his voice uneven and vibrating with passion, his face livid at the mere idea of his schemes being foiled. He was terribly in earnest; his very look made Madeline quail. She trembled and turned pale, as she thought of poor Laurence.

"It's not much I ask you to do for *me*, is it, Maddie, after all I've done for you?" he continued in a softer key. "I have my ambitions, like other men, and all my ambition is for *you*. Give up all thoughts of your lover—that is, if you have one—and be an obedient daughter. It's not so much to do for me, after all."

Was it not? Little he knew!

"Promise me one thing, Madeline," he continued once more, breathing in hard gasps, and seizing her ice-cold hand in his hot dry grip.

"What is that, father?" she asked in a whisper.

"That you will never marry without my consent, and never listen to a commoner. Will you promise me this? Can you promise this?"

"Yes, father, I can," she answered, steadily looking him full in the eyes, with a countenance as white as marble.

"On your honour, Madeline?"

"On my honour!" she echoed in a curious, mechanical voice.

"Very well, then," inwardly both relieved and delighted; "that is what I call a model daughter. You shall have a prize. I will get you some diamonds to-morrow that will open people's eyes; no trumpery little half-set, but a necklet, tiara, and brooches. I saw a *parure* to-day, old family jewels. Hard up—selling off; one goes up, another comes

down, like a see-saw. It's our turn now! You shall wear stones that will make people blink—diamonds that will be the talk of London. If folks say they are too handsome for an unmarried girl, that is our affair, and a coronet will mend that. You have a head that will carry one well. Your mother's blue blood shows. You shall pick and choose, too. Lord Anthony may think——"

"Lord Anthony Foster and Sir Felix Gibbs," said a sonorous voice.

And what Lord Anthony might think was never divulged to Madeline; Mr. West, with great presence of mind, springing with one supreme mental leap from family matters to social courtesies.

The dinner was perfect, served at a round table. The floral decorations were exquisite; attendance, menu, wines were

everything that could be desired. The gentlemen talked a good deal—talked of the turf, the prospect of the moors, of the latest failure in the city, and the latest play, and perhaps did not notice how very little the young hostess contributed to the conversation. She was absent in mind, if present in the body; but she smiled, and looked pretty, and that was sufficient. She was beholding with her mental eye a very different *ménage*, far beyond the silver centre-pieces, pines, maiden-hair ferns and orchids, far beyond the powdered footmen, with their dainty dishes and French *entrées*.

We know what she saw. A cosy farm parlour, with red-tiled floor, a round table spread with a clean coarse cloth, decorated by a blue mug, filled with mignonette and sweet pea, black-handled knives and forks, willow-pattern delf plates, a

young man eating his frugal dinner alone, and opposite to him an empty chair—*her* chair. She saw in another room a curious old wooden cradle, with a pointed half-roof, which had rocked many a Holt in its day. Inside it lay a child that was not a Holt, a child of a different type, a child with black lashes, and a feeding-bottle in its vicinity. (Now, Mrs. Holt's progeny had never been brought up by hand.) *Her* baby! Oh, if papa were only to know! she thought, and the idea pierced her heart like a knife, as she looked across at him, where he sat smiling, conversational, and unsuspicious. He would turn her out now this very instant into the square, were he to catch a glimpse of those two living pictures. He was unusually animated on the subject of some shooting he had heard of, and he had two attentive and, shall we

confess it, personally interested listeners —listeners who had rosy visions of shooting the grouse on those very moors, as Mr. West's guests.

So, for awhile, Madeline was left to her own thoughts, and they travelled back to her earliest married days, the pleasant little sitting-room on the first floor at No. 2, the bright fires, bright flowers, new music, and cosy dinners (the mutton-chop period), when all her world was bounded by Laurence. Was it not still the case? Alas, no! The bald-headed gentleman opposite, who was haranguing about "drives and bags," held a bond on her happiness. He had to be studied, obeyed, and—deceived! Would she be able to play her part? Would she break down? When he looked at her, as he had done that evening, her heart failed her. She felt

almost compelled to sink at his feet and tell him all. It was well she had restrained herself. She resolved to save for a rainy day some of the money he was to give her on the morrow. Yes, the clouds were beginning to gather, even now.

Oh, what a wicked wretch she felt at times! But why had cruel fate pushed her into such a corner? Why was her father so worldly and ambitious? Why had she failed to put forward Laurence's plea, his own long absence and silence, and thus excuse herself once for all? Easy to say this now, when that desperate moment was over—it is always so easy to say these things afterwards! She had given her father a solemn promise (and oh, what a hollow promise it was!), and she was to receive her reward in diamonds of the first water—diamonds that

would blind the ordinary and unaccustomed eye!

Presently she rose, and made her way slowly to her great state drawing-rooms, and as she sipped her coffee she thought of Laurence, and wondered what he was doing, and when she dared to see him, to write? Poor Laurence! how seedy his clothes were; and how much his long illness had altered his looks. With his hollow cheeks and cropped head (his head had been shaved), none of his former friends would recognize him. Then her thoughts wandered to her diamonds. She stood up and surveyed herself in the long mirror, and smiled back slightly at her own tall, graceful reflection. Diamonds always looked well in dark hair. She was but little more than nineteen, and had the natural feminine instinct for adornment. She smiled

still more radiantly; and what do we hear her saying in a whisper, and with a rapid stealthy glance round the room? It is this: "I wonder how you will look in a diamond tiara, Mrs. Wynne?"

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